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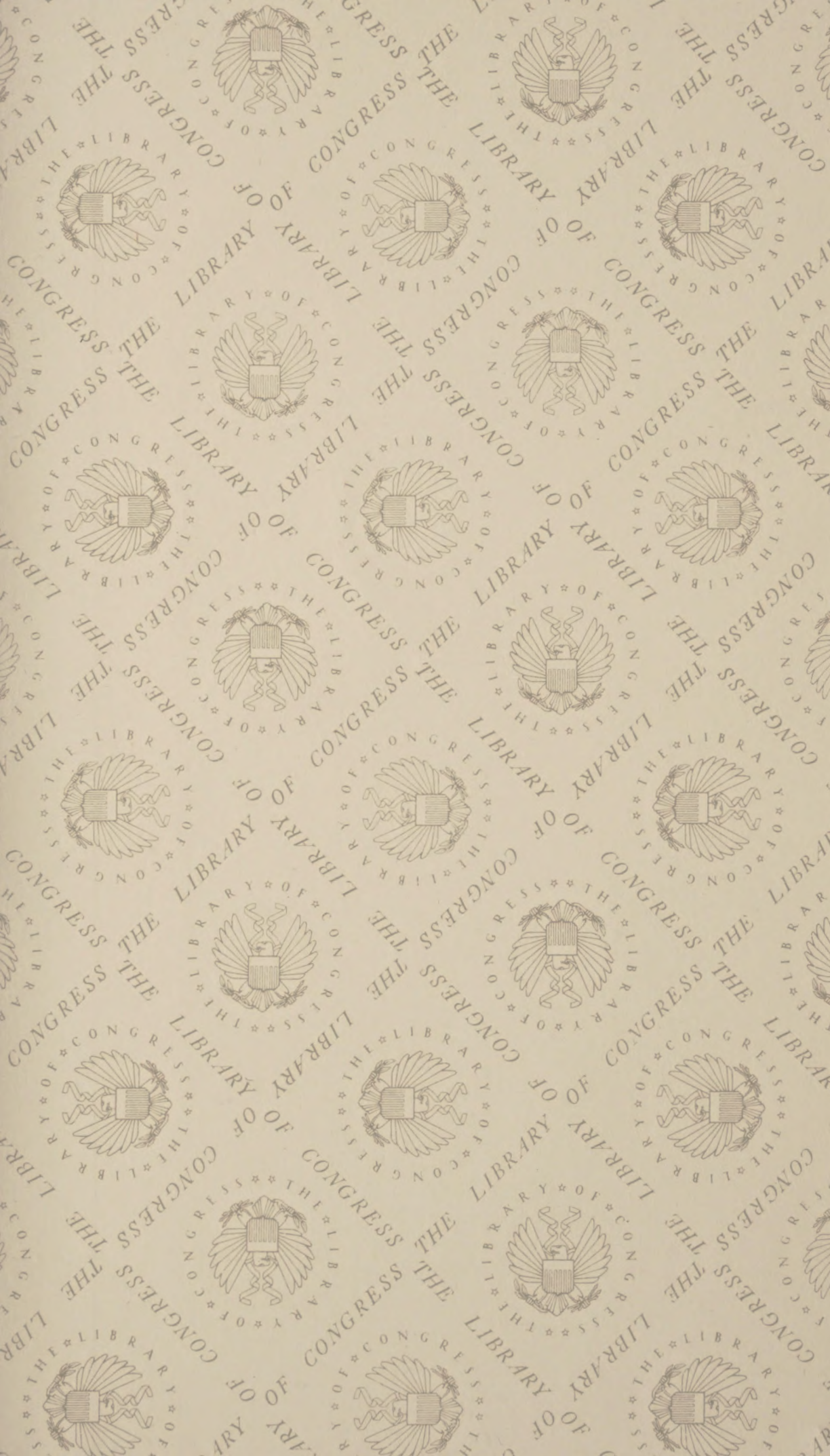
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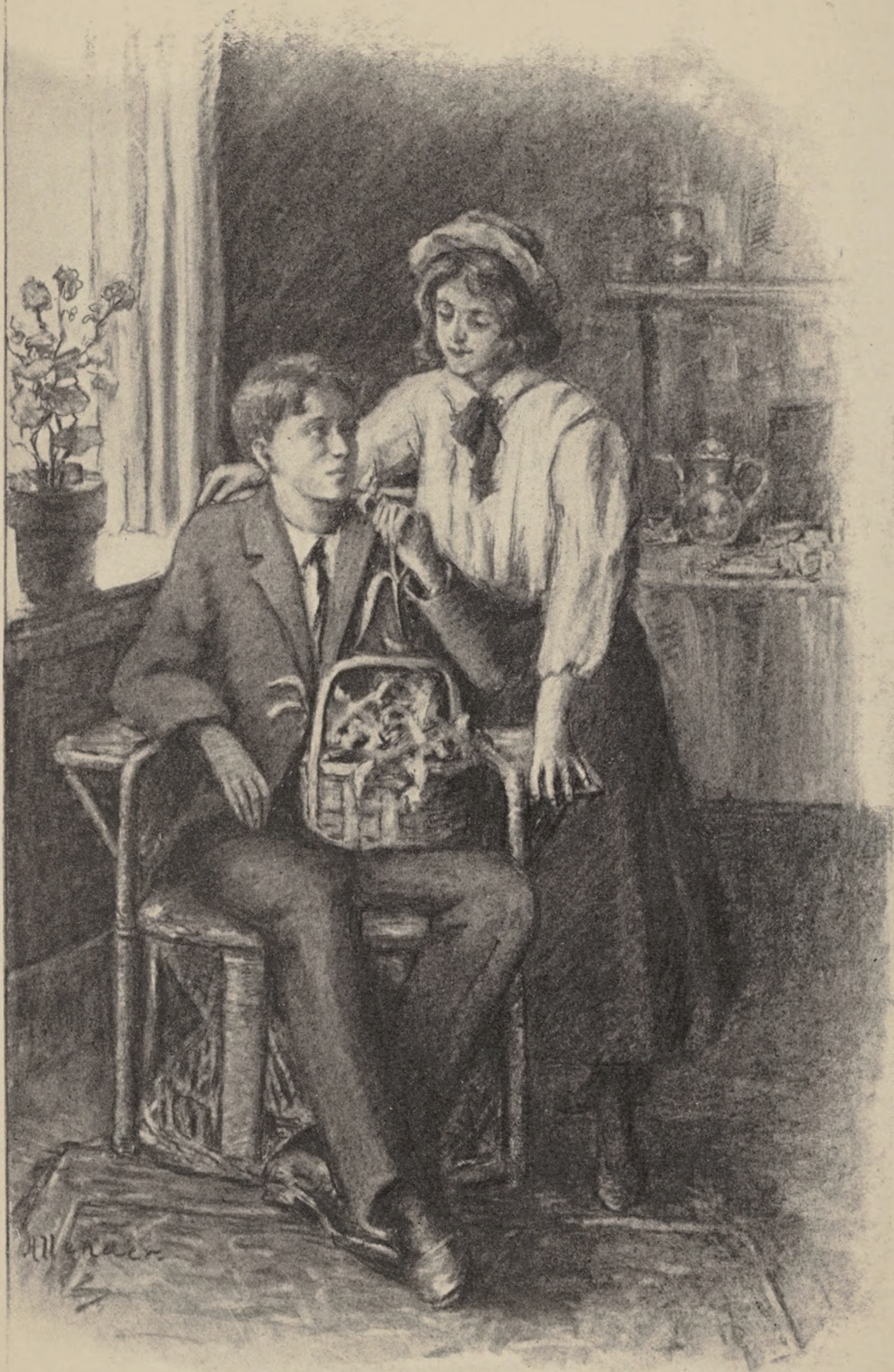
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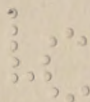
SHE EMPTIED THE BASKET IN HIS LAP

THE HEROINE OF ROSELAND

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY EVELYN
RAYMOND

"Author of
"A Quaker Maiden"
"The Whirligig," etc.

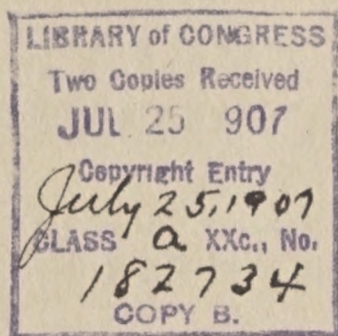


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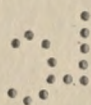
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The Heroine of Roseland

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The Heroine of Roseland

CHAPTER I

A SUPPER AT ROSELAND

“AREN’T they very late, mother?” asked Jerome, sauntering into the great, low-ceiled room which served as both kitchen and dining-room and where the supper-table had long been spread.

“Yes. School’s been out for hours and the children are playing on the common. I’m afraid your father’s gone fishing—his tackle’s missing—and Gail posy hunting. If so, they’ve forgotten everything else. I’ll step out and look up street.”

There was more impatience in Mrs. Graham’s expression than in her words, and, to appease her rising anger, the lad remarked :

“They can’t help it, mother. The call of the woods is in their blood and it’s April; lovely even here, indoors.”

With a sigh, half-weakness, half-longing, he

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dropped into his rocker by the west window, leaned his head back and closed his eyes. The crimson light of the setting sun flooded the place and brought out all its details of homely comfort with the dainty neatness which pervaded them. Also, the rosy light emphasized the boy's extreme beauty and delicacy; a delicacy that explained why, in every room he frequented, there should always be waiting an easy resting place for Jerry.

"For Jerry" was the key-note of the household, and the present vexation of its orderly mistress was more on his account than her own. He had scarcely tasted his dinner and he needed the refreshment of his supper, always his best relished meal. Frugality was the rule at Roseland; but on that spring day Jerome had seemed so languid that the watchful mother had prepared an unusual feast, hoping to tempt his appetite. There were delicately browned potatoes, hot gingerbread and coffee, with a rare dessert of honey. The potatoes were fast drying up in the oven where they had been set to keep warm and the coffee growing stale, and it did seem such a pity!

Indeed, Mrs. Graham was just on the point of returning to the kitchen and serving the meal to such as were on hand when, from the gateless gateway, she saw the delinquents coming down the street.

The Dominie—so called by the mill people whose children he taught—was so short and Gail so tall that she could easily rest her arm upon his shoulder and, during this past year, they had fallen into the habit of thus walking together. He liked her leaning upon him with its sense of giving support, and her light weight served to express without words her love and confidence.

Thus they came onward now, he with his creel and rod slung over his free shoulder and she with her basket of flowers ; and before they were within speaking distance the mother could hear Gail's laughter and see her husband's gravely answering smile, and a queer, unpleasant feeling rose within her own breast that these two lived in a world of their own from which she was shut out. Naturally, this feeling did not improve her already overtaxed patience and she greeted them with :

“ Well, I do think you might remember

your home duties once in a while ! Supper's been waiting an hour and, of course, it's spoiled."

"I'm sorry, Mary. We ——" began Mr. Graham.

But Gail gave him no chance for further excuse ; for, clasping the house-mistress about the waist, she whirled that vainly protesting lady up the path to the open door, exclaiming :

"Sorry, too, mother dear ! and it shan't happen again if —— But what is this I smell ? Coffee ? Fried 'tatoes ? And is it—can it be —honey ? Real bees' honey, not store made ? Mother, tell me quick ! Is there a minister or a 'trustee' hid in your parlor ?"

Mrs. Graham laughed and forgot her vexation while Gail sped to her beloved twin and emptied her basket in his lap.

"See, Jerry, see ! Darling little 'Patties,' and spring beauties, dog tooth violets and bloodroots, and every blessed little posy gone to sleep for the night. Did you dream so many flowers had come already and it only the beginning of April ? Just look at this mass of arbutus roots. I brought that to plant in the garden. Don't you hope it will live ?

And do you know, sweetheart, I've just discovered that all the earliest flowers are pale and delicate in color. White, faint pinks and lavenders and blues, with the dainty yellow tips of the Dutchman's breeches—for all the world like that honey yon. Oh! I am so happy! Yet how happened ——”

Upon this rhapsody broke the mother's prosaic request:

“Gail, run to the baker's for a loaf of bread. Make haste. I'll dish up at once and you should be back by the time we're ready.”

The girl scooped her blossoms back into the basket, to be cared for at a later time, while the schoolmaster returned from placing his fish in the spring behind the house, remarking:

“They're fine little fellows and should give you a nice breakfast, my lad. And, Mary, just leave them to me and I'll dress them all ready for the pan.”

“All right, father. My share will be the cooking,” answered Mrs. Graham, cheerfully, as with her swift and never wasted movements, she touched a bell to summon her other children, placed the food upon the table, set the chairs in order beside it and took her own

place at its head. Then followed the moment of silent grace which brought its own sweet peace upon them; and this over all tongues began to chatter of the day's events and not least of these was the Dominie's bit of news:

“‘Big House’ is empty now. The family has gone abroad, suddenly, and for an indefinite stay.”

“Oh! dear! There goes my market for eggs and chickens, then, and I was counting upon ——”

“Mother, where's the bread?” interrupted small Tom, realizing the need of an article he usually disdained.

“Yes, the bread,” added Jerry, toying with his knife and fork, and seemingly unable to begin his supper. “I'm like Tom, didn't know I cared for bread till ——”

“Brother, don't fidget with your things. It isn't nice ——” began Luella; and her father forestalled a dispute by saying in his school-room voice:

“Bread is the staff of life. It is well we should occasionally be deprived of it ——”

“Why doesn't Gail come?” demanded Luella, rudely breaking in upon the Dominie's

“lecture”; “she’s no right to stay so and keep us all waiting.”

Said Jerry laughing :.

“At last I’ve found a name for this family. The ‘Interrupters.’ Does anybody ever finish a sentence once begun?”

“Mother, excuse me?” asked Tom, yet without waiting response, slipped from his chair and disappeared in the pantry, whence he soon returned with a tin pail of crackers.

“Hurra, small boy! Wise child. If the poor haven’t bread let them eat cake—or its equivalent. Pass them along, Thomas!” cried Jerry.

Even the schoolmaster laughed and helped himself to a biscuit; but Luella, who liked things decent and in order, complained :

“Mother, look ! Tom’s put the bucket right on the tablecloth !”

“Humph ! If you don’t like it get a plate !” retorted the boy, now busily dispatching his food.

“Children !” reproved Mrs. Graham, impatiently rising to remove the objectionable “bucket.”

“Why didn’t you go yourself, Lu? as

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mother would have made Gail do," inquired Jerome with elder-brotherly frankness.

Whereat the little maid tossed her pretty head and, with an inimitable manner, replied :

" Oh ! I am never expected to do house-work ! "

Both lads laughed, but the father looked grave, and a flush of annoyance tinged the mother's cheek. The palatable supper she had been at such pains to provide seemed only to have brought discord with it, and all because of a missing loaf of bread ! She wished she had gone for it herself, then she would have been better served. But Luella and her airs were now promptly forgotten at sound of some commotion outside.

Having consumed a half-hour upon a five minutes' errand, Gail had returned, talking excitedly, holding in leash a great St. Bernard dog, and in her arms the tiniest of terriers. Behind her lagged the baker's boy, shamefaced, pulling his cap and vainly trying to interject a word between the girl's joyous exclamations.

" Oh ! aren't they just dear, dear, dear ?

They're for you, Jerry, darling, and I've named them already ——"

"You see, ma'am ——" began the boy, but Gail went on, unheeding:

"Remember the sandwich-men down town? The giant, 'I take Juniper Tar,' and the dwarf, 'I don't'? Aren't the names fit? And I was only just in time to save their lovely lives. The folks leaving 'Big House' gave them to Peter and the baker wouldn't let him keep them, so Peter was going to sell them if he could, because if he couldn't the dog-catcher would have called for them to-night, and you know what that means. So I got first chance, and Oh, brother! aren't you glad? You've been so longing for dog models, and not a whole dog in the single 'menagerie'—I mean—you know what I mean, and only two dollars for the pair! Think of that!"

The family had remained speechless during this outburst, though as the St. Bernard now settled softly down upon the floor and waved his beautiful brush to and fro, both Jerry and Tom knelt beside him and began to stroke his tawny coat. The schoolmaster sat aghast, while Luella promptly tucked her feet up un-

der her skirts, and it was Mrs. Graham who first found voice, exclaiming :

“ Abigail Graham, you must have lost your senses ! I will not have Roseland turned into an asylum for all the disreputable beasts set loose in Millville. Take those dogs directly back where you got them.”

“ But — mother ! I can't. I've bought them.”

“ With what, pray ? ”

“ With Aunt George's last Christmas money.”

“ Oh, Gail Graham ! You know yourself that went long ago to pay for Jerry's modeling tools,” corrected Luella, while Tom drew near the now dismayed elder sister to inspect the terrier she held.

“ Trust Lu to remember inconvenient things,” commented Jerome, stretching himself out at length and laying his always tired head upon the St. Bernard's soft side. But he smiled as he saw the house-mistress, in her annoyance, absently take the parcel from Peter's hand and carefully place its paper wrapping on the bread plate, while she indignantly tossed the loaf into the coal scuttle.

Whereupon Tom laughed aloud and turned a hilarious somersault, landing with his feet in Luella's lap. This created another diversion, under cover of which the baker's boy disappeared, and Gail hurried to the Dominié's side to whisper appealingly in his ear.

Gradually his stern glance softened till it rested with infinite pity and tenderness upon tall Jerome, so wan and fragile, and with that short, labored breathing which told its own pathetic tale. Already the lad's deft, thin hands were feeling the "points" of his new "model" and his murmured :

"He's magnificent—magnificent! He shall be 'done' in something better than clay!" warned the indulgent father that the matter had gone too far for interference. The dogs had come to stay!

Yet he still tried to be stern with Gail, warning her against any further impulses of this nature, making her promise that these new members of their household should never be allowed to annoy its busy mistress, and finally bestowing upon the now repentant girl the two dollars which were but a nominal

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price for the dogs, yet made a noticeable "hole" in the week's scanty income.

Gail hugged him ecstatically, when he had finished, crying :

"Oh! thank you, father! It won't be forever till Christmas, and another Aunt George present and I'll not forget 'twill be yours and not mine. Nor shall either of these precious doggies bark a single bark! I'll look out for that!"

Jerry's brief excitement had left him more than normally pale, but he now breathed quite easily as he rose and went to the schoolmaster's side, adding to his twin's his own :

"Thank you, father, too. More than I can say. I'll repay you when I sell my first successful model. I'll be successful, surely, some day. But not such names, sister! We can't have them."

"Ah! yes, Jerry, boy! They are so fit! Only, for every day, we can say just 'Juni' and 'Ido.' Come on, all of you! Let's introduce them to the rest of the 'menagerie' and settle them for the night. Then, mother dear, I'll come in and wash the dishes."

With that the four children disappeared in the direction of the old conservatory which sheltered their "menagerie," while the house-mistress set about the clearing of the table with more than even her accustomed energy.

"Mary, wife, I hadn't the heart to refuse, not after I saw poor Jerry's delight," deprecated the Dominie when they were left alone.

"Of course, you hadn't! Did you ever refuse anybody anything? Except me—asking you to look out for your money!"

"But, my dear, the price was absurdly small. If I'm any judge of animals that St. Bernard is worth at least several hundred dollars."

"Unfortunately, there are no fools in Millville to buy him. For my part I wish there wasn't an animal on the face of this earth!"

"Oh! my dear! Don't say that! Because—because ——"

"Because what?" demanded the sorely-tried housewife, foreseeing some fresh trial, and facing about so suddenly that she nearly spilled the milk from the pitcher she held. Nearly, but not quite. Accidents of that sort

were wholly unnecessary, as she often reminded Gail, the careless. "What more is there to come?"

"Nothing, only—I've bought a donkey."

CHAPTER II

THE GREENHOUSE MENAGERIE

As the wild Washoe River tumbled down from the hills it seemed to cut the town in two. But, of course, the river had been there first and to accommodate its own increasing needs, Millville had stretched itself along either bank in two long streets. Never a town more rightly named. Factory Street, on the lower bank, began with the old paper mill; and this was followed by mill after mill, each with its appertaining cottages for its employees.

On the High Street were the homes of the mills' officials, the three churches, the stores and post-office, and a dilapidated inn. There, too, about midway stood the schoolhouse, set so far back from the main street that a grassy common could spread before it. Here were trees and the town pump, with a few benches scattered about, on which the children rested from their games and the old men sat to gossip.

The houses of the mill owners and their managers were more pretentious than the operatives' cottages across the stream, yet only slightly so ; for there was nobody in the busy, commonplace town who was not in some way connected with the factories. In the beginning of things, indeed, a few rich people had recognized the charms of the Washoe Valley and had built themselves mansions on the hills about it. But the noise of machinery and the smoke of tall chimneys had interfered with their enjoyment of the "view," and the isolation of the place made them lonely for "Society." The sight of incessant toil bored them till these incessantly idle people gradually drifted away and left the happy, work-a-day mill folk in sole possession of the town.

So many mill folk there were, indeed, that when the school was started there was no cottage empty in which to house its master ; so that the trustees finally settled him at deserted Roseland, a few rooms of which were still habitable. The place was at the extreme end of the High Street and in its quietude suited him as exactly as it suited his thrifty, tidy wife not at all. The wide, weed-grown

grounds were beautiful in his sight and that of the small twins who came with him, and as time passed, he and they, would have found some use for each of the many musty rooms of the big house. But this Mrs. Graham steadily opposed, keeping her household settled in the few comfortable apartments that had constituted the servants' quarters during the owner's stay.

"No, Philibert, we won't open the rest of the place, save for air and health's sake, now and then. The kitchen will be our living room, the little room beyond will answer for all the parlor we can afford, and three sleeping rooms are all sufficient. They will be as much as I can keep clean; and I shall expect you to cut the grass on this side the house. I couldn't stand an untidy door-yard. I may try a bit of poultry raising in that tumble-down hennery, if you'll patch it up with a few sticks, and we might earn a little that way."

"That conservatory will do to raise flowers in," he had remarked, as they thus made their first round of the place; "all it needs is a new heating arrangement and some fresh

glass and a better supply of water. We might make more money from flowers than from poultry."

"Nonsense! We've no cash for repairs, nor would factory folks have any to spend on greenhouse stuff. The place will make a good playhouse for the twins, but that's all it's worth to us. I would have liked one of those neat little cottages better than this old mansion, but we must make the best of it. Beggars can't be choosers, and a school-teacher is next to the same thing. He has to take what his trustees give him and be thankful."

The Dominie sighed and submitted. He had an almost passionate love for flowers, and it seemed a bitter irony to possess a roomy greenhouse which he could not use.

So it was that the old conservatory came into the possession of the Graham twins; and, later on, of Luella and Tom; till now it was so large a feature of their daily lives that most of their waking hours were spent there. Also, it was no longer a conservatory, but an "Amphitheatre," a "Hippodrome," a "Circus," or more commonly, a "Menagerie"—abbreviated into the "Menag."

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That night when two dogs were added to the collection of animals which now inhabited the glass house, Gail looked about her with great satisfaction, remarking:

“Just to think that this fine collection began with one old cat and a broken-winged pigeon! I was so little then that I can hardly remember, yet so father says. And now—let’s count: Five white mice, a parrot, two gray squirrels, a mud turtle, ten cats——”

“My rabbits what Jimmy Barlow’s goin’ to fetch me, to-morrow,” added Tom.

“Never count your rabbits before they’re ‘fetched,’ little brother. Jimmy Barlow is what the wood sawyer calls a ‘lettle nigh,’ and he’ll not swop rabbits for nothing,” advised Jerry, from his hammock. “But go on, Gail; only hand me that scrap of paper, please, and I’ll make a new list. ‘Juniper Tar’ must go first, and look, look!”

When he had been set free in the glass house the St. Bernard had settled himself on the earthen floor and spread out his beautiful tail as if to display all his best points at once. But the shivering little black-and-tan had resented the hard ground, and, discovering no

better cushion, had cuddled himself upon his companion's brush; and when that great animal presently rose the terrier still clung fast.

Whether this was an old trick of their new pets, the children could not guess, but when the St. Bernard began to circle about, slowly and with great dignity, vainly trying to shake off his yelping burden, they shouted in glee, even prim little Luella exclaiming:

"That's the very funniest thing! See him go round and round, and the tiny one won't let go! Oh! let's make them do that for Saturday's program. Let's!"

"Surely! I wonder how long they'll keep it up!" cried Gail, seizing her whip from a ledge and cracking it in her most approved, ring-master style. But after a few more turns the terrier's paws slipped from their hold and he dropped to the ground, whence Gail lifted him with an ecstatic squeeze. "Oh! you cunning little thing! It'll be worth what Tom calls five whole 'centises' to have you exhibit in our next circus, and I mean to ask it, too."

"Abigail Graham! The idea! I'd like to know what girl or boy in Millville has five

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whole cents of real money to pay with. You must be crazy!" reproved Luella.

"No, small sister, just becoming sane. Just beginning to think. All my thinkings come after my doings, and—now we've got the dogs, how are we going to feed them?"

"Why — why — with stuff," answered Tommy, decisively.

"Certain. But what 'stuff'? To-night they shall have what I didn't eat—my own supper. But, to-morrow? I'm fearfully hungry, even now, and I couldn't go without my breakfast."

Jerome roused himself from his reverie in the hammock to observe, consolingly :

"The 'Menag' always has gone on without costing anything. Why shouldn't it now?"

"Why, because these dogs are ours only, and most of the other things have belonged to somebody else before we took them in to care for and train. But 'Juniper Tar' will eat more meat than a man. The baker said so. That's why he wouldn't let Peter keep him. Mother can't afford to give even us children meat more than once a day, and as for a dog! Fancy mother buying meat for him! That's

the trouble with mother! Her 'thinker' is always right on hand and what she does comes after. I see now. That's why she was tried because I brought the dogs home. I'm afraid—I'm dreadfully afraid, Jerry sweetheart, that we mustn't keep them after all."

"Oh, Gail!" cried Jerome, rising on his elbow and casting a reproachful glance upon his sister, who could bear anything better than her twin's displeasure and who hastened to say:

"Well, we've got them and since you like them I must find some way to keep them. I will find it, dear, don't you fret."

"Jimmy Barlow, he, Jimmy Barlow'll fetch stuff for the rabbits with 'em. I told him he could pay lettuce an' cabbages for his come-inning. 'Less I wouldn't——"

"Sweet innocent, lettuce and cabbages aren't grown yet!" warned Gail, whose spirits seldom drooped for long and who was already planning a way out of her dilemma.

"Wull—wull—he'll bring something they like. Else they can't live here, I told him. Anyhow, I fixed his 'xpress wagon for him and he owes me a nickel for that. I should

think a nickel would keep two gray rabbits a great while, shouldn't it, sister?"

"It might keep two gray ones, but how about the three white ones, honey? I heard Jimmy's mother tell him to 'make a clean sweep of it and get rid of the lot, now those silly Grahams would take them. Else she'd have to cook them in a pie.' But I'm not wise about rabbits. They're the only animals, I guess, we've never taken in. Ask father. He knows everything."

"Old Mrs. Mosher pays seed for her blind canary when she comes to see it ring a bell for its supper. Says she knows 'twould have been 'terrible smart' if it hadn't had the asthma. The asthma was what made her ask us to take it, 'cause she was afraid of catching it herself. So the canary costs nothing," observed Luella, fixing her blue eyes upon the venerable pet now curled up on its swing.

"Kind creature, Mrs. Mosher! Is willing to give us even the asthma along with the seed!" exclaimed Jerry, his momentary fear of losing his new models banished by his twin's confident assurance that this should not be.

“The cats catch their own mice,” added Tom.

“And would like to catch ours, only we keep the cage out of reach!” laughed Gail, at last setting about the business of finding beds for the new additions to their “stock,” and remarking: “I don’t believe there ever were four children had such a splendid place of their own as this dear old greenhouse! I know the village children envy us, sometimes. Come here, Mr. Tar, if you please. Try this old bit of carpet under the shelf. Isn’t that fine? Now lie still, sir, and don’t you dare bark even once! I’m going to get your supper.”

With a ready understanding that he was among friends the dog obeyed and Gail tossed the terrier down beside him. Then she disappeared and Luella soon followed her. Tom, also; leaving Jerome alone and drowsily considering the problem of how to meet the expenses of their rapidly increasing menagerie.

Mrs. Graham was quite willing the children should have as many pets as they wished, provided that these became no tax upon the scanty household purse, though she did rather

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resent the fact that everybody in Millville seemed to consider the old greenhouse a suitable "dumping ground" for any bird or beast which had outlived its owner's interest.

It had been Jerry's suggestion, long before, that to offset expenses there should be a "circus" held every Saturday afternoon, with an admission fee in corn, table scraps, nuts, milk, bird seed, or any other eatable thing, as well as broken glass and old shingles wherewith to repair the roof that sheltered the troupe of performers. These fees he had rated at a fair value and were readily paid by the village children, according to the convenience of each.

On their own part the young Grahams had trained their animals to do many cunning tricks, honestly striving to make their exhibitions worth seeing; though it was mostly due to Gail's efforts that they had succeeded; and there was not a girl nor boy in town who did not think that old greenhouse at Roseland the most delightful spot on earth.

There was the big, oblong room in front, with its shelves still in passable condition, with a circular, high-roofed palm house ad-

joining—a fine “ring” for the weekly performances. During the property’s tenantless years, much of the glass had been broken, but the schoolmaster had patched up the open spaces with bits of carpet, boards, or matting; and a gale that had blown the tin roof from a mill shed had helped wonderfully. Given possession of the tin, a swarm of lads had helped Gail bring it home and, when it had been nailed in place, it made the snuggest corner possible for the high shelf whereon were stored Jerome’s completed models. The clay for these came from the river bank and Mr. Graham himself saw to it that a supply was always on hand, though he had often to caution the ambitious young sculptor against over-exertion.

Although others, too, loved it, only Gail guessed how dear beyond telling was this quaint old “studio” to her frail twin, or knew of the ambitious dreams which thrilled him, lying in his hammock, slung in its coziest corner. He often spent his evenings there, alone as now, or with her on a bench beside him, ready to talk or keep silence, as best suited his mood. If they had moonlight or

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starlight to keep them company, it was well ; if there was only darkness, still they were content. For the love and sympathy of this brother and sister were quite beyond ordinary, scarcely needing speech to make their thoughts known to one another. They were also very like in outward appearance, save for the difference in physical strength ; though Gail insisted that " Jerry is the brain and I only the body of the pair."

But the girl herself had brains in plenty and was swift to find a way out of every trouble she got into. Which was a good thing for, as she had admitted, she generally acted without much thought ; as now, delighted to secure new models for her artistic brother she had not stopped to consider how these models were to be kept alive and in vigor. But they must be kept, somehow. She had promised Jerry that they should be, and she would never disappoint him—never !

So all the while she was dashing through her dishwashing, her face was thoughtful and she had scarcely rinsed and hung up her towels before she had seized her hat and presenting herself before her mother, asked :

“Motherkin, may I go to Mr. Sampson’s?”

Mrs. Graham looked up rather anxiously from her darning. “Motherkin” always preceded some unusual request, as this. What further annoyance had that evening in store for her? She replied by another question: “Why?”

Mr. Sampson was the butcher and his shop probably closed long ago. Besides, Mrs. Graham preferred to do her own marketing, and Gail had a fastidious dislike to “that raw-meaty place,” even when sent there upon an errand.

“Because the dogs will have to eat and I know you want all the table scraps for your hens. I’ll have to get cats’ meat for them of him,—if I can.”

“Cats’ meat for dogs! How silly you are, Gail!” corrected Luella, from her own low chair near the lamp, where she was crocheting trimming for an apron. From the fact that she disliked wearing any garment not fancifully decorated and that she was perfectly willing to use her own skilful little fingers for the purpose, Luella’s nickname was the “Trimmer.” Also, because she had already

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become a clever needlewoman, she had a fine disdain for her sister who was so big and so awkward at sewing.

“Well, small sister, it would be dogs’ meat in our case. Peter said that a little meat boiled up in a good deal of Indian meal made good food for them.”

“Even cats’ meat costs money, Abigail. How would you pay for it?” asked the house-mistress.

“By doing something I—I hate—but could. Twice, lately, Mr. Sampson has asked me to help him ‘a minute’ fix his books. His accounts, I mean. He’s a horrible writer and a worse figurer and gets things so mixed. So, when he’s been cutting our meat and I’ve been waiting I’ve sometimes straightened out a page or two of what he calls his ledger. A greasy old ten-cent copy-book that smells——Whew! Now, if you’re willing, I’m going to offer to keep his book for cats’ meat. He’s too stingy to pay a regular clerk but I hope he’d pay me, this way. And the meal—but I haven’t got to the meal part yet. May I?”

“You must not let the bookkeeping interfere with your home work, Gail, and I doubt

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if the man will agree to it. He's very penurious," said Mrs. Graham, "but you may try, if you wish."

"Whom do you expect to bring home your nasty old cats' meat, Miss Abigail? You needn't look to me to do it, and you know that Tom's no dependence. I'd rather go without a dog all my life than earn one that way," exclaimed Luella.

"Oh! no you wouldn't, girlie, if it were 'for Jerry'; and I shall trouble nobody to help. Fancy! One of those 'odd Grahams' going into business! The butcher business, at that! But I'll do anything 'for my Jerry,' so wish me luck and here goes!"

Away she sped up the darkening street, bolstering her own courage for a distasteful task, and for the almost harder one of asking a favor; and arrived at the shop only to find it closed. But a light shone from the windows behind the shop and, folding her arms tight, as if bracing herself for a trial, she hurried to the open side door, and called:

"Mr. Sampson! Oh, Mr. Sampson, please."

"He ain't here. Who's there? Shop's shut this hour," answered a voice from within.

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"It's I, Gail Graham. I came to see Mr. Sampson on business, but—but I'll call again ;" for the girl had recognized the voice as belonging to the butcher's wife, and if there was one of her neighbors whom she cordially disliked it was good-natured Mrs. Sampson, the town gossip.

But the woman was already at the door, pleased by the chance of an evening visit, even that of a young girl, and eagerly assuring her caller that :

"I told him he better not go out to-night. Somebody's sure to come, forgot their mornin' meat. But he'll be in right to once. He ain't gone no further nor the post-office. Not that we ever get any mail, 'cept once a week, the 'Marketman's Journal,' an' that ain't due till Monday. Come right in an' se' down. How's your ma? An' little sis, an' Tommy—ain't he the boy? Never see his beat for 'tradin'' an' gettin' old truck an' dicker. Makes it all over new, too, my Adelbert says. Come right in. Take my chair. It's the comfortablest, an' he'll be here in a minute. How's that other boy, your twin? Ain't he the very peakedest creatur' 't you ever see and

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live? 'Pears like he gets peakeder 'n ever all the time. My Adelbert's home. He'll be glad to see you. He's quite takin' to noticin' the girls, lately. Delly? Oh, Delly! Come in the settin'-room. Dominie's Gail has come to pay you a call."

"Dominie's Gail" sprang to her feet with the impulse to run away. To face the butcher himself had been hard enough but to take his whole family into her confidence was too much. Adelbert! Gail had to inwardly repeat many times the talismanic words: "For Jerry!" before she sat down again to meet Adelbert.

CHAPTER III

GAIL GOES INTO BUSINESS

“How are you, Miss Graham?” asked Adelbert, entering the room and sidling toward the visitor, awkwardly extending a long, clammy hand, which Gail did not take—a fact that surprised its owner, who settled himself on the lounge, his legs stretched out straight forward and his arms along its back.

“If he were a sum I’d do him by linear, measure,” thought the schoolmaster’s daughter, surveying the uncouth lad as she would some natural history specimen. “He’s long all over, and lanky—and so silly! Seems as if he couldn’t belong to the same class of human beings as my Jerry.”

Then, as if her own thought of her brother had brought him back to Mrs. Sampson’s mind, that lady remarked:

“Never thought when you folks moved here ’t you’d ever raise your twin. He’s grown tall, guess he an’ Delly’s about of a

height. Never make old bones, poor creatur' ! Pity he's so sickly ! ”

For a moment Gail's heart stood still. Jerry was called “ delicate,” she had always known that ; it was the fact around which all the family affairs revolved, and from her earliest memory there had been no difference. But “ sickly ” ? The word was repulsive, suggesting unpleasant things. There was nothing repulsive about her Jerome. Nothing, never. He was the sweetest, purest, most beautiful thing in the whole world—her world. And outside of it she could imagine nothing more lovely. She hastened to correct Mrs. Sampson's opinion :

“ Beg pardon, but my brother is not ‘ sickly.’ And he is not, in the slightest degree, like Adelbert.”

“ In looks, he ain't, 'course. Delly's fair as a lily and Jerome, he's one of the dark complected kind—like you. Queer ! Me and him has often noticed how you two older ones was like your pa—he's dark as a mulatter—and the other like Mis' Graham. Blue eyes and good skins. She's an awful smart woman, your ma is ; else she'd never get through all

the work she has to do with such an odd family as she has to manage. Why, Delly says you have regular doin's with all them wild animals you keep in that old greenhouse circus. Don't see how she puts up with it, and she so terrible tidy."

Some reply seemingly expected, Gail answered, stiffly :

"We have no 'wild' animals in our 'menagerie'; and none are allowed to worry mother. We take care of them ourselves, as well as help her with her poultry."

"Humph. Glad of that. As I say, she's a nice woman. I wish she'd be more neighborly like, but I s'pose she don't care to mix much with folks, she's so close mouthed and people will ask questions. How old be you now?"

"Fourteen."

"Jerome's about the same, I guess."

"Probably; since we are twins," said poor Gail, pondering an escape and wondering how long "he" would be detained.

Adelbert said nothing, feeling that his mother was fully capable of entertaining their visitor, but he kept his protuberant eyes fixed

upon her till she was disconcerted and restlessly straightened the folds of her over-full skirt. This action diverted Mrs. Sampson's attention to Gail's attire and she remarked :

" Ain't it queer how much more pains your ma takes to make Luelly look nice 'n she does you? But I've heard she didn't have to buy no clothes for you two big ones. They're always give to you. Is that so? "

It came to the tip of Gail's too-ready tongue to retort impertinently, but her very indignation helped her to keep quiet, as, also, did an injunction of her always courteous father : " Be more polite to the ignorant, or inferiors, than to even your equals." Besides, the funny side of this cross questioning showed itself and wondering how much more her hostess might desire to know, she answered, quietly :

" Yes, it is so."

" Law me ! Now ain't that nice. Saves your pa a lot of expense. I s'pose some of his rich relations does it, don't they? "

" Yes. My Aunt George."

" Sho ! Never heard of a woman named 'George.' Thought that was a man's name,"

continued the now thoroughly happy Mrs. Sampson. She was finding this Abigail Graham, the Dominie's "offish" daughter, the most delightful of visitors, and positively glowed with satisfaction when the girl smilingly replied :

"It is. She's my Uncle George's wife. It's just the Graham way of talking. We fit names to everybody—only for fun ; and as she's said to be just—just the shadow of her husband—we say that. I expect she's a very kind person."

"She must be. How often does she send your things?" probed the inquisitor.

Gail laughed outright, then gravely replied :

"Twice a year. Every spring and fall. Mother thinks that Aunt George is bidden to do this by Uncle George and has to make the money he gives go a long way ; which explains that my things are always a little out of date—they're cheaper so—and of unpopular colors. Else, she wouldn't, likely, have sent me this big-plaided skirt to wear with a green waist and a red hat trimmed with blue. I'm a trial to my little sister, Luella, whose

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clothes always match, even if they are of cheap material. Luella is a much cleverer girl than I am. She can fix her things herself while I—I hate a needle and thread.”

Gail had delivered herself of all this information, hoping to tide over further questioning till Mr. Sampson's return, and feeling that if that were not a speedy one she could not await it.

Adelbert now volunteered a compliment :

“I think you look nice in anything. I—I wouldn't mind goin' out walkin' with you even—even in them things.”

Upon this outburst, the youth's doting mother rolled her eyes upward, smiled and winked at Gail, in a manner meant to be very knowing but which that young person considered decidedly silly.

As she made no verbal comment on Adelbert's chivalrous statement, Mrs. Sampson's thoughts returned to Jerome's health, and she inquired :

“Has your brother been more complainin', this spring, 'n usual? I ain't seen him pass, lately.”

“My brother never complained in his whole

precious life!" responded Gail, indignantly. "He'd scorn to do such a thing. And I wish you'd please understand that he isn't at all what you call 'sickly.' He has never been very strong. That's all. He's no different from all the time past. Do you think your husband will be here soon?"

"He ought. But why, if he ain't no worse, has the Dominie gone and bought a donkey for him, then? I heard the doctor said it might be a good thing, so when the cotton-duck-supe wanted to sell hisn your pa snapped at the chance, though there was others wanted it."

"A donkey! My father has bought a donkey? Well! that's news to me!" cried the astonished visitor. "I think you must have been—been misinformed," she finished, using the most impressive word she could recall, and wondering, in her heart, if this thing could be true, yet she not the first to hear it. For, of course, she did not know that her parents had purposely kept the fact for a surprise to Jerome, to be postponed until the animal's actual arrival at Roseland.

"Oh! No, ma ain't mistook. Me and pa

was right there before the tavern with a couple of calves in tow when 'twas done. The donkey shied at the calves and the calves shied at the donkey, an' we had enough to do till we tied their legs. Yes, sir, guess it was 'most as good's your circuses!" corroborated Adelbert, glad to have speech of any sort with one of the Domine's household, which had long been his secret models of behavior. The twins were about his own age and the lad's admiration of the handsome Jerome was as sincere, if not as profound, as Gail's own.

On the rare occasions of his young life when Jerry had been strong enough to endure the discipline of regular school sessions, Adelbert Sampson had always been also present. When Jerry lapsed so did Delly; and it was his fond mother's assertion that:

"Them two boys is mate and mate. Like as two peas; only my Delly, he's got a heart and the schoolmaster's boy hasn't. More nourishment, ourn gets, though don't put no fat on his bones. We've been particular, him and me, to have our only son keep the best company in Millville, and there's nobody better 'n the Grahams, though they are so kind

of set up an' stand-offish. But Delly, he's as good as them if he ain't as odd. They're all queer together, from the father down. I always studied out there was some kind of mystery 'bout 'em. I can't fathom it yet, but I will some time."

"I reckon you will, neighbor," had replied Uncle Hiram Smith, the old wood sawyer, whose antiquated mill stood on the branch of the Washoe which circled the grounds of Rose-land, and whom the young Grahams considered their closest friend. "But I wouldn't worry, if I was you. The Dominie and his tribe may be odd; but—just stop and reckon up what Millville would be without them. Then leave 'em to go their own gait and be thankful you know 'em."

"Well, I shall raise my Delly as genteel as I know how; and here's your joint—fifty cents' worth as good mutton as ever was cut out of sheep!" had responded the matron, serving at need in her husband's shop, and handing to the old man his present purchase.

"Raise him sensible, and let the genteel part take care of itself," had been the unheeded

advice, when this talk had taken place some years before.

The result of Adelbert's enforced gentility was evident that memorable evening, when his father had returned and Gail had forced herself to tell her errand ; for he not only remained to hear their business discussed but to make some comments upon it, which his father cut short by saying :

“ You young popinjay, you ! Keep still. Ain't it disgrace enough to me to have you so dull you can't add up a row of figgers ? I had no chance, when I was a boy, I hadn't. But you've had. All the schoolin' you could take, and what'd I hear this very night down to the office, but as how you go by the name of ‘ Sissy Sampson ! ’ Ugh ! You'd better not let a girl shame you no more.”

With that the butcher discussed terms with his would-be bookkeeper ; with the result that she felt she could earn all the meat Jerry's dogs would require and that her employer had made a close bargain in her services. But in vain she tried to reckon how much cats' meat, at five cents a pound, it would take to cover six hours' labor a week ; or as many more

hours as might be required to straighten the butcher's tangled figures.

Between the gossiping cross examination she had endured and the facts it had disclosed, her head was sadly confused and aching; and for the first time in her life she was terrified concerning Jerry's health, indignant that anybody should dare to consider him seriously ill, and almost angry with her father at his secrecy about the donkey. In her eagerness to escape this house, she said a hasty "Yes" to all Mr. Sampson's suggestions and an equally hasty, "Good-night, all," and stepped out into the night.

Its darkness, accented by the lamplight within, struck her like a wall, and a sudden burst of thunder warned her that a storm was near.

"Oh! How long I must have stayed! What will mother say!" she exclaimed to herself, though as it happened, loud enough for Adelbert to overhear.

"Never mind what she says. 'Scoldings don't hurt none, and whippings don't last long,' and I'll see you home!" consoled that gallant youth.

Gail's hat blew off and though she had to stop and rescue it, she pretended not to have heard the boy's speech. But his mother had heard and interposed :

"Now, sonny, you'll do nothin' of the kind. You don't know what might happen if the shower come up an' you got your feet wet. You stay right here to home with me."

There was a moment's hesitation in Adelbert's mind ; then he answered as valiantly as rudely :

"You shut up, Ma Sampson ! I ain't a goin' back on my word if it does rain. I said I'd see her home and I will. So there !"

"Well, if you do, you'll have pretty good eyesight !" called a clear, merry voice from somewhere in the darkness, as Gail's nimble feet carried her swiftly down the long, steep street.

She had almost reached its limit and the gateway of her home when her break-neck speed was arrested by a collision with somebody, trying to make his way amid unknown surroundings.

"Hello, there !" cried a masculine voice, quite unfamiliar to the breathless girl.

“Yes—hello yourself! I mean—beg pardon. I didn’t see you. I——”

“Exactly. I’m—I was—in the same fix myself. Can you tell me if I’m on the road to Mr. Graham’s house. Schoolmaster Graham.”

“Surely. It’s my home. I’m his Gail.”

“Ah! indeed! I call that a most fortunate collision if you will guide me there.”

“Certainly; it’s not far now,” answered the girl, yet with a new disturbance in her heart. Another idle speech of Mrs. Sampson’s, that had been scarcely heeded when uttered, returned to set her wondering if the gossip had been true, after all, and if this were the man which it concerned. If so ——

Well, she had promised to take him to her father but she half-wished the stranger might fall into some bottomless hole of the old pathway before that meeting took place.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCING BALAAM

FOR the first time in her young, healthful life, Gail could not sleep. She had found her father busy over his books in the little parlor, or study, and had presented the stranger as :

“ A gentleman who wishes to see you, father, and whom I ran against in the darkness. We got home just in time—hear that rain ! ”

Mr. Graham had risen and bidden his visitor good evening, proffered him a chair, and looked toward his daughter in a manner she understood to mean dismissal. So she stepped to his side, kissed him good-night, warned him to watch that it did not rain in the windows, and disappeared up the stairs. But she had occupied her few moments of delay to scrutinize the guest's appearance. He was a stranger to Millville, of that she was sure. He was a much younger man than the Dominie but bore about him the same unmistakable air of refinement and culture. Yet, oddly enough,

his intelligent face offended her and she would far rather have had him one of the mill men, come—as they sometimes did—with complaints about the master's treatment of their children.

Another curious effect the caller's appearance had upon her was that she shrank from speaking of him to her mother, whom she found shutting up the house against the storm and whose question as to what unfamiliar voice she heard below she answered hastily:

“Oh! just a man come to see father. But mother! What is that I heard about a donkey?”

Mrs. Graham laid her finger on her lip, warning silence, and glancing toward the big room which the brothers shared in common.

“Softly, Gail. They're asleep, I think. You're very late, but come into my room. I will explain.” Her tone was vexed.

“Yes, mother, I know and I'm sorry. But Mr. Sampson was away and I waited for him, and Mrs. Sampson told me. I didn't believe it at first, but Adelbert insisted it was true. Is it?”

“Yes. Your father intended it as a sur-

prise. It is for Jerry. To keep him out of doors. It tires him so to walk. It is to come here in the morning. I wish that woman had not gossiped and spoiled your father's pleasure in the gift," answered Mrs. Graham, beginning to make ready for bed.

"But—I'm so glad! What fun it will be! Yet ——"

"Well, child. What are your 'buts' and 'yets'? If you've questions to ask, be quick about them. I've had a hard day and am tired."

"Only, I wondered how we could afford such a luxury."

"We ought not, and could not, if we lived anywhere else than at Roseland. Your father claims there is grass enough going to waste to feed the creature, although I don't know how he reckons that, since we've always sold the grass, and its price has been a help. However, the matter is settled, and if we don't—don't need the animal after the summer is over, it can be sold. There, don't ask any more questions, and don't tell the other children. Let your father have his surprise, if he enjoys it. Oh! I wish that man would

go away and let the house get quiet! My head aches. Good-night."

Gail had entered her mother's room, intent upon asking many questions, and upon matters far more grave than the coming of the donkey, but she shut them up in her own heart till a more convenient season, and very noiselessly—for one so impetuous—she waited upon the tired house-mistress, bound her aching head with a soothing lotion, and, when all was ready, turned out the light and left the room.

Any demonstrations of affection between these two were rare; and almost as rare was the slight word of praise and gratitude which followed her away:

"Thank you, Gail. You are a good girl."

But this was music in her ears, and should have sent her to her own bed, where Luella was soundly sleeping, and to happy dreams. On the contrary she tossed restlessly, and the low murmur of voices began to annoy her as greatly as it had done her mother. Even when the voices ceased and she heard the outer door shut and fastened upon the stranger's departure, she could not close her

eyes. So, cautiously rising, lest she wake some sleeper, she crept to her window and looked out. The study was directly beneath, and she could see a light streaming outward over the grass. This meant that the schoolmaster was still below stairs, and, in another moment, she was at his side.

“Why, Gail, my child! You awake so late? Are you ill?”

She had come to unburden her own worries, but a glimpse of her father, as she tiptoed into the room, had, for the moment, banished these. She had found him with his arms outstretched upon his desk and his head bowed upon these, and she had heard a sort of groan escape him, with the one word “Failure!”

“Father, dearest! Who was that man? What did he want? What makes you look so unhappy? Oh! I wish I’d never, never, shown him the way! I wish I’d left him to fall down the old culvert and break his hateful neck!”

It was the Dominie’s turn to be astonished, and both sternness and this surprise were expressed in the one word: “Abigail!”



SHE CLASPED HER ARMS AROUND HIS NECK

Whenever the girl was called by her full name by any member of the family, it—as Tommy expressed it—“meant business”; but when it fell from the gentle schoolmaster’s lips, it sent a sharp pain through her heart. In a moment she had drawn her kimono tight around her, and made a place for herself upon his knee, while she clasped her arms around his neck.

He made a whimsical protest against this action, saying :

“Getting a big girl for this sort of babying, my dear !”

But he put his own arm about her, and she dropped her head on his shoulder, begging :

“Now, father, tell me ; ’cause I heard—that wretched old Sampson woman ——”

“Mrs. Sampson is not old, girlie, and speak respectfully.”

“I can’t. Not of her. Not yet. I—I—hate her.”

“Abigail ! You hate nobody. You misjudge your own warm heart. Now, out with it : what has our neighbor done to you ?”

“More harm than I can tell, all at once. First : is that the new man who’s come to—

to—to see about taking your place in the school? Is he? I never dreamed ——”

The Dominie's fine face turned paler even than its wont, as he answered :

“ And I never dreamed that this matter had become public gossip ! ”

“ Why, father, you've always been the head of the school here. Always, since it was started. Everybody in Millville loves you. Every child in the mills, that has a bit of education, owes it to you. I was only a baby, you said, when you came. I can remember nothing different all my life. Why should you want to go away ? ”

He leaned his cheek against her head and, in a tone as sad as calm, replied :

“ It is not I, Gail, who wishes for a change. But—the world progresses ! and the trustees of Millville public school have decided that I do not progress ! They need a change—for less money. But—I had hoped that change wouldn't come yet. Not just yet.”

For a time they sat in silence ; each leaning upon the other, as it were, each seeking for the right word of comfort. At last Gail fancied she had found it.

“I’m sure as sure that there’s some great mistake. The trustees don’t understand. Why, father dear, I’ve heard you say yourself that some of them can scarcely write their own names. That Mr. Sampson, for instance. If he were told how hard you study, how you spend more money than mother thinks you can afford in buying new books and journals, I’m sure he’d not let you go. Not for anything in the world! What would the dear old schoolhouse be without my father at its head?”

“It’s not to be even the ‘dear old schoolhouse,’ daughter. The people propose to build a new one. To aid in doing this they claim they must reduce expenses. They pay me six hundred dollars. A younger, unmarried man, without a family, will serve for four. To him it’s merely a makeshift, an aid to his college course. But I—we cannot possibly live upon less. So it seems.”

As Gail listened to his quiet talk, quiet both in tone and manner, she realized that this was no sudden news to the Dominie, and she wondered why he had not spoken of it before. Also, it seemed to her that her mother’s rather

sharp tongue would have uttered some complaint had she known of the matter, and she asked :

“How long ago did you hear this, father? Does mother know?”

“Several weeks. There will be no change until next fall and I did not tell her till the thing was really settled. You must not mention it, either, until I give you leave. I am more sorry than I can say that it came to your ears so soon and in the manner it did. Try to forget. We have still a long, bright summer at old Roseland—and who can guess what a whole summer may bring forth? Now, to bed! Forgive your father if he has distressed you by his own disappointment, and go to sleep knowing that I have a fresh, far pleasanter surprise for you children in the morning. Good-night, once more. I shall go to bed now.”

“Father, I think you’re the bravest, noblest man who ever lived! To have had this trouble and never to have said a word to anybody, to have been so cheerful—you are a wonder!”

“My child! Don’t! Your love and faith

are very sweet to me, but in the eyes of everybody else, the life of Philibert Graham would seem a failure. Good-night."

He put out the light and followed her up the stairs, smiling a little in the darkness and comforted more than he knew by his child's loyalty. As for Gail, she was now smiling, too, remembering how little of a surprise to her, at least, was that which the schoolmaster had prepared for the morning.

Of the other worries she had meant to discuss she had almost forgotten to think, and would not now have spoken even were the chance offered. Why should she worry, anyway? Jerome was just as well as he had always been. How could anybody be that horrible "sickly" who was so gay, so ambitious, so unfailingly gentle, even when he was most "tired"? True, he gibed at them all, set their various faults, as well as his own, in an absurd light which made them long to be cured of them, but did it in such a sunshiny way as nobody in the world could, save her darling Jerry.

It was very late. Gail remembered that she had never been awake so long before, save

when Luella and Tom had had the scarlet fever and nobody had slept, fearing what the night might bring of sorrow. She began to feel exceedingly drowsy, and nestled down beside her little sister, picturing that small maiden's critical surprise, yet delight, over that grand addition to the "menagerie" which was coming in the morning. Then she was asleep, worries and pleasures alike forgotten; and the next thing she knew, Luella, wide awake and dressed, was skipping around the room, clapping her hands and exclaiming:

"Oh! the darling little brown fellow! Get up, Gail, get up quick! How can you lie and sleep when such a perfectly beautiful thing has happened? Hark!"

Through the open windows of the boys' room, across the hall, came excited chatter, bursts of laughter, and Jerome's clear voice reciting an impromptu doggerel. "Limericks" were the commonest forms of fun with the schoolmaster's children and out in the clothes' yard the lad was busy concocting one:

"Oh! see the donk, the wonderful donk!

With coat all brown, like a little monk.

He's a wee-scrimpy tail

But an ear like a sail,
And he sings through his nose : ' Ah-honk !
Aw-honk ! ' ”

The donkey had come, then, and she not present at his arrival !

“ What's he like, Lu ? Does Jerry —— ”

But Luella had paused to answer no questions. She had been sent to wake the over late Gail and had vanished the instant she had done so, and it seemed to the impatient laggard that she never, never would be dressed ! She was half-minded to forego her bath, but knew she wouldn't feel tidy without at least “ a dip and a rub,” so made both operations exceeding brief, jerked a comb through her short wet curls, literally “ threw ” on her clothes, and joined the group out of doors while still buttoning her waist—“ up all wrong ”—as critical Luella informed her.

Nothing mattered. There stood the donkey, a “ thoroughbred, Californian burro, trained to the use of women and children,” as it had been advertised. A pretty, gentle little animal, with big mild eyes, standing quietly to be admired, and wearing a comfortable saddle with a card attached.

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As Gail appeared Jerry caught her hand, bestowed a hasty morning kiss on her half-dried cheek, and gravely presented :

“ Miss Graham—Mr. Burro. A gentleman and future member of the Roseland family. His first name—Miss Graham has the honor to mention that.”

So saying, her twin gravely unhooked the card from the saddle and gave it to her. The card was inscribed : “ To Jerry, with love,” and as she read it Gail exclaimed :

“ It’s father’s gift and he should name it ; or mother, if she wishes !”

But in her heart she understood that the request was Jerry’s way of telling her he wanted her to share in everything he enjoyed ; and she was glad that both parents declined the “ honor.” The Dominie did so with a smiling shake of his head and her mother with the impatient remark, as she turned to enter the house :

“ I can’t, but do get him named, somebody, and come to breakfast. It’s a trial to cook for this family—never ready to eat when meals are fresh.”

“ Mr. Balaam Burro Graham, pleased to

make your acquaintance. May you live long and be happy!" then quickly answered Gail, sweeping the indifferent donkey her profoundest curtsy.

"Now, let's go. Tom, you may tether him to that clothes-line post and hurry in. It's too bad to hinder mother when she's so busy," said Jerry; and laying his thin hands on a shoulder of each sister gaily forced them along before him to the breakfast for which they were hungry but he cared not at all.

Yet the meal was to be still further delayed, for at the entrance appeared the post-office clerk with a "special delivery" letter. Such a thing had never before occurred in this quiet household and it was with trembling fingers that Mrs. Graham, to whom the envelope was addressed, broke its fastening, while the too curious clerk lingered to learn "the news."

CHAPTER V

GREAT UNCLE JORAM

MRS. GRAHAM read the letter, handed it to her husband, nodded dismissal to the postal clerk, and took her place at the table. If any of the young people expected to hear what the letter contained, they were to be disappointed. For the present the astonished lady kept silence, merely exchanging an excited, wondering glance with her husband, then proceeded to serve breakfast as usual. Even the privileged Luella ventured no more than :

“ Wasn’t that queer, mother? To have a letter sent to you and not we to have to go to the office after it! Was it an Aunt George one? ”

“ Do you wish more oatmeal, Luella? ” was the house-mistress’s only reply, while Tommy cried :

“ There, missy, you’re squashed! ”

“ Thomas! ” reproved his father, and the boy devoted himself to his mush, yet kept a close watch upon all the faces about. Something more than ordinary was in the air, and

the mystery deepened when immediately the meal was over both parents went into the study and closed the door behind them. Mrs. Graham's manner was as eager as agitated, but the schoolmaster had grown even graver than usual, and Gail wondered what new trouble had come to rest upon his shoulders.

But she began, at once, to clear the table and make ready for her dishwashing and this natural proceeding served to make the others forget their curiosity and set about their usual tasks. To Luella belonged the feeding of the canary and the parrot, but she rarely attended to it, knowing that if she did not somebody else would, and Gail being that "somebody."

Tom was supposed to look after his mother's poultry and was more faithful to his duty than Luella to hers; which was due, probably, to the fact that once a month, if he had not neglected it during that whole time, he was given ten cents. Out of the dime he had to pay his Sunday-school tithes, but what was left was his own to spend as he pleased. Tommy was very glad when the months had but four Sundays in their calendar; those which had five were a trial to him and he had

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them all marked with the blackest of ink in the almanac which hung in the greenhouse.

Jerry strolled out to inspect his new burro, reminding Gail that it was Saturday and a "circus" due.

"So hurry up your work, girlie, and let's get 'rehearsal' over early. Then, maybe, we can have a ride on Balaam."

"Who's 'we,' brother?" asked Luella.

"The four 'silly Grahams,' puss."

"Did ever Jerry have anything he didn't share with all, Lu?" demanded Gail.

"N-no. But—but he has never had a donkey-burro before. And there's only a boy's saddle came with it. The card said 'To Jerry,' and—and I think it might have been given to all if it were meant so."

"Come, little sister, don't be jealous. Jerome's the oldest—bar me—and I don't count. I'm only the lesser half of a splendid whole!" answered the elder girl, impulsively clasping her twin about his slender shoulders and keenly studying his face in the sunshine that fell on it through the open door. She was searching for signs of the "sickliness" which Mrs. Sampson had intimated but she

saw nothing different from ordinary. She wished he were strong, like other lads, but then—would he have been just the same beautiful, gifted Jerry?

“There, Abigail!” he retorted, laughingly removing her hands. “If I must be hugged let it not be by a wet dish-cloth. I washed before breakfast. Come on, Miss ‘Trimmer.’ ‘Polly-cracker’ has been screeching her head off and ‘Mosher’ ringing his bell this ever so long. Tend to them and you shall have the first ride on Balaam.”

“Brother, no! That shall be yours, it must be, father wouldn’t be pleased, else. Luella, don’t you be piggish enough to take it,” protested Gail, always quick to look after Jerry’s interests.

“I had no idea of such a thing, Gail Graham! I guess I’m as much of a lady as you are, and ladies—real ones—are never ‘piggish,’ ” returned the sister, giving her yellow curls that airy toss which was so characteristic, so pretty, and—so exasperating. Then she followed Jerome out of the house and Gail returned to her dishwashing with great haste and a keen regret that she had again come so

near quarreling with selfish little Lu. But her regret was not so much because quarreling was wrong as that it annoyed Jerry.

“He shan’t see me do it again, Miss Tabb!” she remarked to one of the cats which had strayed indoors; “but ‘Trimmer’ can be so disagreeable!”

“So can anybody. Your father among them!” snapped a voice behind her, the first intimation that the house-mistress had reëntered the kitchen and was greatly annoyed.

Gail dared not ask any questions, but proceeded diligently with her own task, while the Dominie, also, reappeared, took his hat from its nail, and started off up the steep street.

Mrs. Graham sat down and leaned her head on her hand; then, after a moment remarked:

“That letter was from your father’s Uncle Joram. He is coming to make us a visit. Land knows what we’re going to do with him, Job’s-turkey-poor as we are and not a spare room to put him in, and he so rich. The first time since you were born that he’s ever noticed my husband and now—to take us all unprepared like this. I wanted Philibert to

make him stay at the tavern but he won't. Says he owes a great deal to the old man, even if they have been estranged so long. Even said it was 'Providential'—this visit. Well, I hope it will prove so. He's rich enough, I guess, to support us all in luxury, if he had the mind. Anyhow, he may be able to help your father to something better than school teaching. 'I'll give him the best I have for the sake of my boyhood, but I'm sorry he wants to come,' was all I could get him to say. And the house in such a state! Besides, where can he sleep?"

It was sign of unusual perturbation on Mrs. Graham's part that she should have said so much to Gail, but she was, indeed, sorely tried. Her husband had dashed her sudden hope that this unexpected visit might mean better fortunes for themselves, nor had he sympathized in the least with her anxiety as to the "state of the house." He had assured her that it was already spotlessly clean and ready for the reception of anybody at any and all times. But that was a man's way. "A man couldn't see dirt, even if it was right under his nose!"

“ Well, Mary, a man would certainly have exceptional eyesight who could descry ‘ dirt ’ in a house you reign over,” he had declared, and to end the discussion gone away. But he came back to say : “ Please don’t interfere with the children’s pleasure in their holiday. Saturday, you know, and I want Jerry to try his new steed ! Gail, take him to that place we found—behind the old sawmill—where the flowers are so thick and the pine trees make a shelter. It would be well to take his hammock on the donkey’s back, as well as himself. Then he can rest without lying on the ground. Good-bye.”

Gail had finished her dishes and stood perplexed. She felt she ought to help her mother in this extra cleaning, although so unnecessary, yet that her father’s wish was almost a command to go away with her brother into the restful woods and the pure, sweet air of that lovely morning. Of the delight this would be to herself she dared not think, lest she must give it up.

“ Mother, what was the trouble between father and this Uncle Joram ? ”

“ I never knew. It is a mystery. Phili-

bert will never speak of it, and has never before spoken of his uncle, at all, since we were married. He said then that it was a personal matter which concerned the past and could not affect my comfort. But now—— Well, we shall know more when this visit is over.”

“I call it a visitation, not a visit! Horrid old man, sending ‘special’ letters to scare hungry folks out of their appetites, and inviting himself where he isn’t wanted! If there’s been trouble between him and my father, it’s not my father who’s to blame. I know that. And I know too, mother dear, that everything is as nice as can be already. You swept the rooms yesterday, as you always do on Friday. If you wish I’ll wash the windows for you and—let’s see. Put the gentleman to sleep in your room. You sleep with Lu, and father can lie on the lounge in the study. I’ll stay in the ‘menag’ with the rest of the wild beasts. It’ll be the safer place for me, because if Great-uncle Joram’s as hateful as I think he is I shall be apt to let him know I know it. I’ll sleep in Jerry’s hammock out there and dream I’m a sailor a-sailing on the deep blue sea! ‘A life on the ocean wave. A home on the rolling

deep,' etc. And who knows? Maybe, just maybe, when this unknown gentleman really arrives he may find us such a perfectly, angelically delightful household that he'll be angelic himself and adopt the whole crowd! Maybe, maybe! You'd look just sweet in gray silk, little mother; and you shall have a blue kimono for headachy days—— No! there'll be no headachy days when Uncle Joram makes us rich! And, if I get the windows done, the beds made, and the vegetables ready for dinner, can I go with Jerry? Take a bit of bread and butter or something for lunch, and get home by three o'clock—circus time? Can you spare me?"

"Yes. I'll try to." Mrs. Graham's tone was much more cheerful and the girl's review of the situation had made her see for herself how much better it was than she had, at first, thought. Unfortunately, she was one of those over-nice housekeepers who find it necessary when a guest is coming to refurbish their whole house, as if a well-bred guest would ever poke about looking for faults. But Gail's "maybe" had so fitted in with her own secret hope that she felt it strengthened into the be-

lief that old Mr. Graham's coming was wholly a visit of reconciliation and beneficence.

"Never mind the windows, Gail, I'll have time for them myself. You never will poke your skewer close enough into the corners of the panes to get them really clean. But you can make a bed very well. Put the pair of linen sheets on mine and fix the room pretty. Then, after you've fixed the vegetables—it's soup day, remember—you may go. I should be very sorry, myself, to disappoint Jerome and I do hope the donkey will help him. Else, it's too bad we bought him."

"Thank you, mother, and I'll 'kill two birds with one stone'—though I'd never kill any if you please! But I'll run to Mr. Sampson's, get my dog-cat meat and his book. He's going to put his sales down on a piece of paper every day and I'm to enter them all neatly in the book. He's promised to get a new one, too."

At this moment Luella came in and her mother suggested:

"Lu might go for you, Gail, this once, and you get through that much earlier."

"Go where? Go what?" demanded that

young person, drawing her little chair toward the window and taking out what Tommy called her "everlasting tatting."

She was soon informed of the letter's contents, but instead of agreeing to her mother's proposal she promptly declined it.

"Why, mother! Company coming and the trimming not all sewed on my new white apron! Not even done yet. No, indeedy! I told Gail in the first place I wouldn't fetch her old meat for her and I'll have to work terrible hard to get this edging done in time. I don't believe I can bother even with the circus;" and down bent the yellow head, in and out flew the little white fingers, and the pretty face settled into a very stubborn expression.

"Child! Not 'bother' with the circus? Why, whatever would the 'orchestra' be without our Jews-harper? And all these new 'features' of the 'trained dogs,' the 'California burro'—by the way, how did you like to ride him?"

"I—I hated it. He's got heels—for all he looks so mild. I was just smoothing his snippy little tail and up he flung them. You

and Jerry can keep your old burro, for all I care."

"Luella, did he hurt you?" anxiously asked Mrs. Graham. Though, as she claimed, all her children were equally dear to her, danger to her golden-haired daughter alarmed her soonest.

"No, mother. He only hit the hem of my skirt. But he scared me horrid. I don't like to be kicked at, and I don't want to go to Sampson's ——"

"Say 'Mr. Sampson,' dear. He's a trustee. But you needn't go. I will fix the vegetables, myself, and that will give your sister more time. Sit right still, honey, and do your pretty trimming. Mother's proud of her clever little girl."

Gail laughed, but not unkindly. Though all the rest were expected to do their share, even Jerry had some light tasks, Luella had "life made easy," as Tom said. But, after all, she was not wholly selfish; she had been spoiled by too much petting and admiration, and in her heart was very fond of her frail elder brother. She often remarked that he and she were the two "refined ones" of the

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work-a-day family, and the nearest like the wonderful young people of story-book pages. She now looked up from her work to offer :

“ I’ll do whatever you want me to, here at home, Gail. I wouldn’t like to keep Jerry from going to the woods and I know he can’t go alone, without you.”

This was more than enough to satisfy Gail. For anybody to be thoughtful of Jerome meant more to her, by far, than thought taken for herself. She had already picked up her dust cloths and brushes, ready to fix up her mother’s bedroom for Uncle Joram’s occupancy, but lingered to swing her arms about her little sister with an appreciative squeeze, crying :

“ Oh ! you sweet thing ! Thank you for being nice to Jerry ! ”

Luella wriggled herself free.

“ Why shouldn’t I be nice to him, Abigail Graham ? And I do wish you’d mind what you do. You’ve raveled a whole scallop of my work and I hate to be hugged with dust-cloths as much as Jerry does with dish-cloths. Do go on and not hinder ! ”

Not the least bit offended by Lu’s petulant

answer, which was quite in the natural order of things, Gail went singing to her task above stairs and the house-mistress to her own preparations for the family dinner; and before long everything was accomplished that need be before the twins' first outing with Balaam.

Though he had never ridden before, Jerry had no trouble with his gentle burro, the only difficulty being that he was "rather too long" for his mount, the stirrups lengthened to the last inch and barely escaping the ground as he rode. However, that chance to ride seemed like the gateway into a new world. Always a lover of outdoors, never able to walk far because of that terrible oppression of his breath, he was so happy that Gail exclaimed:

"Oh! you precious brother! You just fairly shine! and you make me so glad I can hardly help shouting. What lovely, lovely times we shall have! what long, delightful days—anywhere, everywhere; what splendid chances for new things. You'll find bugs and beasts galore, and I new flowers. I mean to be a first-class botanist when I grow up, and an artist. I suppose it's being an 'artist' to be able to paint posies as well as if one could

paint people. You the greatest sculptor in the world—your humble handmaiden the finest flower painter! Hurray! Hoor-ray! Oh! Hur-r-ray!”

That Tommy did not join in this woods expedition was his own fault. The forest did not appeal to him half as much as did an old clock that had come into his hands by way of exchange. He had exhibited his acquisition to the family, with the explanation:

“It’s one of them fifty-centers, won’t-goers, ’t Jimmy Barlow’s aunt gave him to make him wake up. They was a alarm to it, but Jimmy busted that, first thing. Said he wasn’t goin’ to be scared the very minute he waked up, not for nobody. Didn’t care nothing for the clock, anyhow. House full of ’em, and after the alarm was spoiled what use? So I swopped two-three dozen marbles, what Jerry made me out that new, hard clay, for the clock. I’m goin’ to take its insides out an’ put ’em back right. If I was a clock-maker, I’d be ashamed to make the won’t-go kind.”

So, out in the old greenhouse Tom spent a happy morning. The twins had not taken

Juniper Tar and I Don't with them. These were safely shut in the palm-house, and there was nothing to disturb the boy's mind, so mechanically intent, save the familiar chattering of the gray squirrels and an occasional remark from the parrot. The lad's back was toward the door of the greenhouse and he did not hear it opened, nor the entrance of a stranger. At that moment he had succeeded in making the alarm "go" at a sudden and fearful rate, by touching it with a small blade, and the noise was deafening. It was not till Polly-cracker had traveled around her cage, head downward, so many times that she was on the verge of bird apoplexy, and had screamed a new cry over and over, that Tom roused from his absorption and looked behind him. Then he sprang up and almost screamed, too. For there sat the queerest old man, the very image of the ogre in a fairy book, puffing and blowing like a porpoise, and staring about him from under terrible eyebrows in a manner quite fierce enough to frighten any little boy.

"Take off your hat! Take off your hat! Br-r-r-rr! Hold your old tongue-wicked—

wicked—WICKED CREATURE!” shrieked Poll, almost crazy with fear or rage.

But in reality Tommy was no coward. It had been the desire of his story-loving heart to see an ogre, a real one, and he was prompt to appreciate the visitation of this one. Also, the parrot’s new cry, “Wicked creature!” astonished him, and must be the result of the ogre’s call.

“Humph! I ain’t afraid of you!” cried the boy, thrusting his legs far apart and his arms akimbo, with a rather overdone air of bravado.

“Huh! You aren’t, hey? Do you know who I am?” demanded the visitor, gruffly; then shifted his seat uneasily, and, in so doing, felt himself sinking downward through something very wet. He seemed to be doubling himself up, his feet suddenly flying roofward, like the blades of a jack-knife, and his back going down till it looked as if his fat paunch would burst his vest buttons.

“No, I don’t, and I don’t care; but I tell you what, there ain’t no old ogre ever lived going to squash all my Jerry’s nice wet clay out the box! I—a pretty kind of a ogre you

are! Quit squashing, I tell you, or I'll call mother!"

Then the ogre groaned and extended his fat, hairy hands, and by the force of his terrible eyes compelled Tom to seize them.

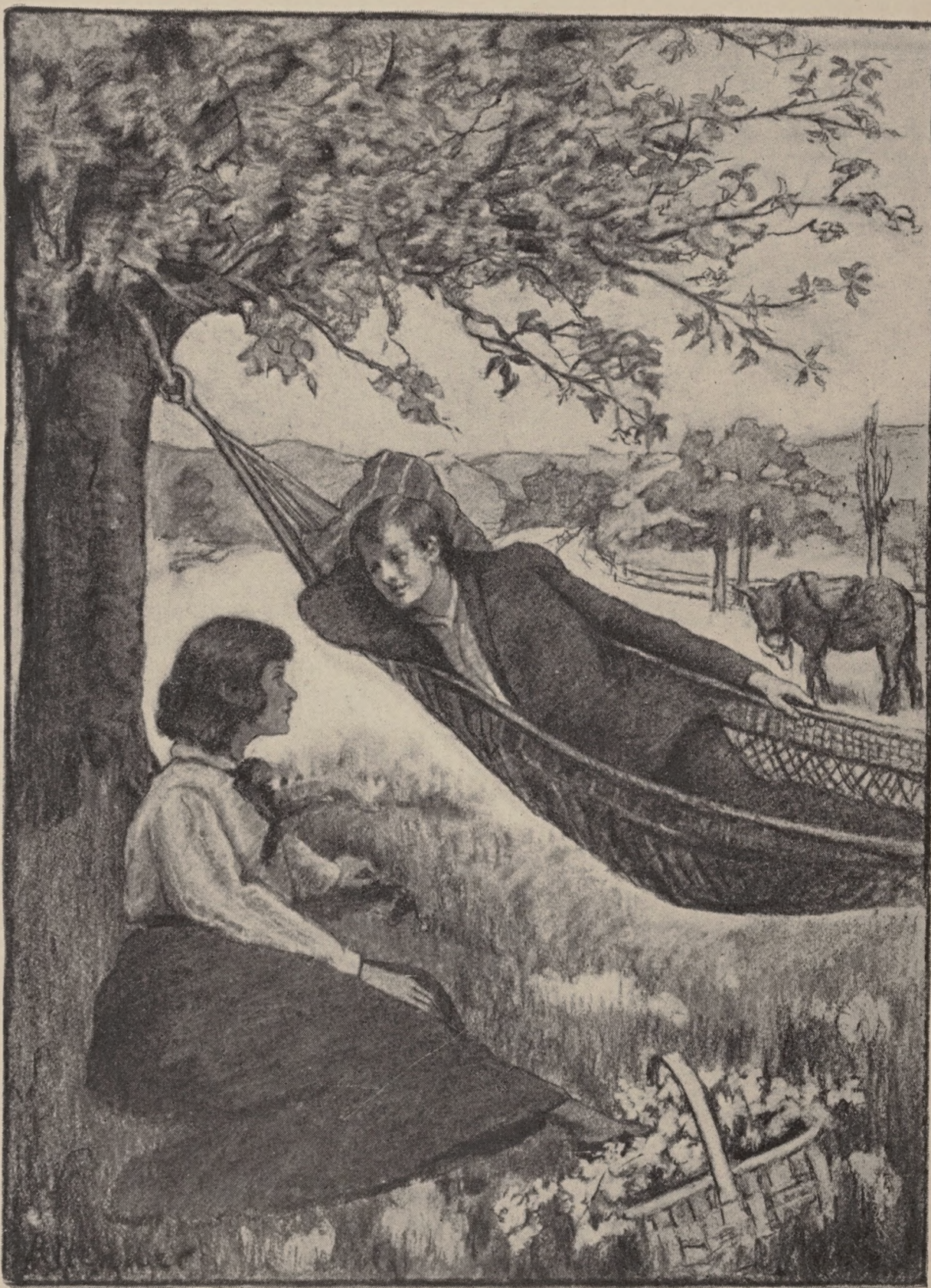
CHAPTER VI

UNDER APRIL SKIES

GAIL had hung her brother's hammock under two freshly budding maples and he lay resting in it, with his gaze turned upward through the pink-tipped branches. Across the blue sky swept a few white clouds, which might develop into an April shower but, at present, served to pleasantly temper the sunshine—hot for so early a season. His face was a trifle paler even than usual, as if his outing had been a bit wearisome, but he looked very happy ; and seeing him so made her exclaim :

“I believe if you could ride out here, or somewhere like here, every single day, you'd get as strong—as strong as Mr. Sampson ! He's the strongest man I know. Queer, isn't it ? That he should have such a big, fine body and so little a mind.”

“Maybe not so little a mind as little education. I used to think that Adelbert had



"ISN'T THAT A LOVELY BUNCH OF BLOODROOT"

more sense than he got credit for; only he's been made a baby of to his undoing. Yes; when I went to school, and saw him oftener, I liked him."

"Jerry Graham! You—liked—that Delly creature? well, I am surprised."

"Gail, don't you let yourself take prejudices. I want you to grow into a grand, just, impartial, noble woman. One that I should have been proud to claim my twin."

"'Should have been!' What means my lord by that past tense when we are all in the 'future to come'? See, isn't that a lovely bunch of bloodroot? I believe—I'm almost tempted to put them in mother's room for that horrid Great-uncle Joram who was so mean to father."

"There you go again, girlie! How do you know that he was mean to father? how ——"

"Jerry Graham, could father, himself, be mean to anybody?"

"No, I don't think he could."

"But quarreling is meanness, isn't it? If those two quarreled, as mother said, or left me to think, then the meanness must have been on the other's side. I haven't had a

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chance to tell you about my visit to Mrs. Sampson. I hate that woman ! ”

“ You hate nobody, little sister. You couldn't, if you tried, for your heart is too big. I think I'd drop that word, if I were you, dear.”

The girl flung her lapful of flowers to the ground and sprang up to peer into the hammock in sincere astonishment. “ You turned critic, Jerry, you? Well, of all amazing things ! ”

The lad laughed ; then said :

“ Not hatefully critical, girlie, you know that. But my thoughts come so fast, I am so ambitious for you, and I have—so little time.”

“ You ‘ have all the time there is, ’ haven't you, dear? And I fancied you were a trifle ambitious for yourself, my genius ! ”

“ Oh ! I am. Never fear but that I'm almost sick with longing to do some one wonderful, beautiful thing. But just one, even, would give me courage.”

There was a new ring in the boy's voice which struck his sister's heart like a blow. It was almost a hopeless tone and she had never known Jerry to be aught but the most hope-

ful. Mrs. Sampson's words came back to her : "Peakedder than ever." Was he? Why was it, too, that all at once she had begun to worry over his extreme pallor and weakness? She could not remember when he had been any different. From their babyhood she had been the strong one, serving him hand and foot, but not once having seen him ill in bed. "Sickly?" "Sickly" people sometimes died —— Oh! could Jerry? With a half-suppressed sob at the mere thought she bent above him, took his thin face between her hands and turned it strongly to the light, scanning it through fast rising tears with a very agony of love in her appealing gaze.

"Jerry, Jerry, sweetheart! What is the matter? With you, with me, with—everybody? Only yesterday we were all so care free and happy, and now just within this one little night everything seems so changed. What makes me worry about you? What makes father have to lose his school, if he doesn't want to? Why should horrid old great-uncles come and stir people up, this way? Why—why—— Is there a mystery about us, about you and me, darling, as that dreadful

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woman suggested? Why—anything—everything?”

“I guess, sister, it’s what the books call ‘life,’ and its perplexities. They come to everybody, I suppose, and we’re growing up. Very like Mrs. Tabb’s four kittens. She’s taken care of them all along, so lovingly, till the other day—when she cut them adrift to care for themselves. It was very droll. I was in the greenhouse, in my hammock, studying her lines and curves for a new model, when the fun began. The way she went for those babies when they bothered her was curious. Boxed their ears, snapped and growled at them, drove them off every time they invaded her own corner—I do wish you could have seen those astonished kittens! Talk about expression! I never saw a human face show more surprise, anger, disgust, and, finally, indignant independence than theirs did. If I could have put it all into clay! I should have made our fortunes. I reckon we’re like the kittens, have grown up without realizing it, and life is boxing our ears to rouse us to the fact.”

It was a long speech for Jerry and left him

quite exhausted. He lay silent, after that, recovering, and Gail sat down on her rock to rearrange the flowers she had dropped. The peace of the scene stole into her troubled heart, and she was too young and healthy to grieve for long over imagined evils. But the suggestion of some "mystery" in their home remained to set her pondering, and, at last, to say :

"I never thought, till last night, but it is queer, it is very queer, that when Aunt George sends the boxes of clothes they are always just for you and me. I don't remember that ever there was anything in them for Lu or Tom, or even for mother and father. They're just clothes that have been picked out for cheapness, no matter whether they were pretty or not. Yours aren't so bad because you're a boy and tailors, who make boys' things, don't use blue or green or red in them. And why does she send the boxes, anyway?"

"Evidently, to save expense for father. It must have been arranged between them for he's never surprised when they come."

"Oh! of course it's 'arranged'—I understand that all right; but—why? That Mrs.

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Sampson put a lot of things into my head I'd never dreamed of before. I heard only half she said, either, she talked a blue streak! but she thinks it's queer you and I are so 'dark complected' while Lu and Tom are so fair. Also, she was complimentary enough to say that we are smarter than the others! Ahem! Don't you feel 'sot up'? Almost she made me fancy we were 'changelings,' such as we read about in those Irish folk-lore stories. Who knows? Maybe we are, prince and princess, fairy creatures, or 'Little People' in disguise? Heigho! If that were true, wouldn't it be fine? Then all we'd need do when we wanted anything would be to wish. Say, brother, if you could have just what you most wished, what would it be?"

Gail stretched her own slim body along on her mossy rock, clasped her hands behind her head, and gazed upward, as Jerry was doing from his hammock, beginning to trace pictures in the clouds and, for the moment, forgetting her recent and unusual "worries."

"What do I wish for, girlie? What I have always wanted most of all was just strength. Strength—to do what any other boy of my age

could do. Strength—to learn to be a real sculptor and make beautiful things for other people to enjoy. But now, lately, I don't care for that so much, though I still long to do one splendid thing!"

"If 'one,' sweetheart, why not many? a hundred, a thousand, a whole life full?"

"One might be all that there was time for in one life. One uplifting thing left in the world might be enough to make that life worth while. But, after all, living beautifully is better than making even the grandest statues. So I guess, I begin to see, that making people happy is the best thing to wish for. Father says that 'goodness is happiness—happiness, generally, means goodness.' A reversible equation, isn't it? I think he partly meant that unhappy folks are rarely good. We see that right at home every day. When things don't go right we're cross. So I 'cipher it out,' as Uncle Hiram Smith says, that working, or trying, to make everybody happy would, also, be to make them good. And that's what I'd like to do, if—there were time. Anyway, it's what you must do—and do for us both, since it's you who has the strength."

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This was again a long discourse for Jerry, and it had been uttered so gravely that another keen pain shot through the listener's heart. It seemed as if her beloved brother were despondent concerning his own strength—and that was a subject he had rarely talked about or even seemed to consider. Like the rest of the household he had accepted the fact that he was not like other lads, without either comment or complaint. Well, they hadn't come out into the woods to be miserable! And with something like resentment against these unaccustomed fears and fancies, Gail now left off cloud-gazing and sprang to her feet, exclaiming:

“Of all the ungrateful youngsters in the world, we're the worst! Lying here like a couple of old growlers, trumping up troubles, when we've just been given this magnificent 'Californian,' this glorious morning, and—two big, big slices of bread and butter! Balaam has eaten all the nice young leaves he could reach and discouraged any nice 'green grass growin' all around, and the nice green grass growin' round.' I'll take my little pail and go down to Uncle Hiram's for water—'cause

father forbade our drinking from this brook—then we'll have lunch. I've noticed that when Tom gets a little crusty mother always gives him something to eat. What we two need is something to eat ourselves; then life won't appear half so solemn. Anyway, I blame myself for beginning the blue talk. And ——"

Jerry laughed and sat up in his hammock, saying :

"I guess we have been rather 'serious' for folks that were off on a lark, and what's to hinder my going with you to Uncle Hiram's? I shan't feel that Balaam is quite all right till we've had that expert's judgment on his 'points.' The wood sawyer's the greatest horse trader in Millville, I've heard. And he'll be glad to see us. He's a sociable old fellow. You fetch up the steed and I'll roll the hammock. Oh! how sweet the air is! But— isn't it growing rather dark, all at once?"

They had been lying with their backs toward the west and now turning around Gail saw all that part of the sky covered with black clouds; also, a sudden, swift breeze swept the ground and went sighing through the maple

branches overhead, warning the uprising of a storm.

“ My ! how threatening that looks ! Almost a greenish-brass color, like before a thunder shower. ‘ April showers ’ may bring ‘ May flowers,’ but I don’t like your being caught in one, Jerry Graham. So, hurry up—I mean, of course, don’t hurry—but just—be as quick as you can without hurrying,” urged the girl, who had already brought up the donkey, and who knew well that any “ hurrying ” only hindered in Jerry’s case. A too hasty movement on his part was apt to bring on a sort of faintness that compelled complete rest for a few moments, till he could recover.

But if he dare not hurry, she was anxious to get him under shelter as soon as possible, lest he take cold from getting wet. The old saw-mill, belonging to “ Uncle Hiram ” Smith—so called by all the children of Millville—was the nearest place she could think of, as well as the most delightful. To reach it in safety, to picnic in its wide shed—open on one side to face a charming outlook, perched on the great, sweet-smelling logs, with water to drink from the sawyer’s famous spring—what a delight-

ful climax to their lovely morning! And as for the trip there, it would have just sufficient danger to be exciting. All sombre thoughts and fears were forgotten now, as Jerry mounted the willing Balaam, and they set off downward through the fast darkening wood toward that branch of the Washoe where the old saw-mill stood, with its one end finished to make a dwelling place for the sawyer.

"Seems as if that donkey was afraid he'd hurt his feet! Did you ever see an animal so careful? I do wish he'd hurry, for his doing so wouldn't tire you. Come, slow-poke! step lively, there!" cried Gail, as a roll of thunder warned her that the shower was really coming and rapidly.

"I'm not posted on burros, girlie, but I think I could travel faster on my own feet. Anyhow, there's no need of two getting wet, so you go ahead and I'll follow. 'If I had a donkey what wouldn't go, do you s'pose I'd wallop him? Oh! no, no!' Trot along and tell Uncle Hi that I'm on the road, somewhere."

"Well, I guess not! Leave you alone here in the wood? what if he stumbled and threw you or ——"

Jerry shouted in laughter. "Stumble? this careful creature? Never. Stumble isn't in his vocabulary. But, giddap, Balaam! Do you think we've all day to crawl down a briery, stony, woodsy hill? well, we haven't. We're the Great and Only Graham Circus Company! The Greatest Show in Millville! And you, Sir Balaam, are its newest, most attractive feature! Move, sir, move!"

For answer, there came a deafening roar from the sky and the biggest sort of rain-drops began to pelt them. The effect was apparent astonishment on Balaam's part; for he planted his forefeet firmly among the stones, dropped his head and stood rigidly still.

Entreaties, cajolings, proddings moved him not; but Jerry was already half-drenched, when Gail unwrapped the hammock and folded it tightly about her brother's shoulders.

"That'll do to keep the wet in if it doesn't off!" consoled the lad, already shivering in the chill breeze which accompanied the shower; "and I really think I'd best get off and walk. That'll warm me and keep me from taking cold. Oh! you poor sister! You're soaked through. Why didn't you wear a jacket?"

“How should I know it was going to rain? or that this hateful, stupid beast would act so? Oh! I wish we’d never come! Do you feel so very, very cold, sweetheart?”

“N-No-o,” answered the lad, with chattering teeth. “But I’m going to walk. Come on. We’ll go slow but move we must. Come.”

“But what shall we do with the donkey?”

“Leave him to consider his faults. I believe that as soon as he finds he’s being deserted he’ll follow.”

Which proved to be exactly the case. No sooner than the twins had disappeared behind a clump of bushes, Sir Balaam set out to follow, and he did this with much less care concerning his steps than when he had borne his young master on his back. The fact was, though unknown to his new owners, that he had been trained to just such exceeding care when being ridden by the lame little lad to whom he had formerly belonged, and that he was less balky than he had seemed.

The walk to the sawmill was the longest Jerry had taken that year and it was made uncomfortable by the steady downpour. Gail

walked close beside him, a supporting arm beneath his, and her basket of flowers in her other hand. Their paper-wrapped luncheon was beneath the flowers and thus, she hoped, kept dry ; but there was vexation in her heart, if not real tears in her eyes, that their happy morning should have ended so disastrously. Taking cold always effected the boy's frail strength, though, oddly enough, rarely gave him a cough ; and it was such a pity he should take cold now, when the spring was here and so much to enjoy. Also, when he had just obtained two beautiful dog models and was so eager to copy them. And—would that slow, painful, downhill climb ever end ?

Of course it did. Sooner, maybe, than the anxious sister realized ; and there, as they came round the bend which showed the old sawmill at their very feet it seemed, was the dear old sawyer standing in the shed, gazing out as if he just expected them, and waving his arms in that hearty fashion which they loved.

“ Well, well, well ! Of all the blessed things ! Here was I, all alone, with a big pot of soup a-boil, wishing some friend 'd drop in to enjoy

it with me and along come you two, 't I'd rather see than anybody else in town ! ”

Nor did his warm welcome stop there. At one glance the sawyer had perceived the lad's almost exhausted condition and, just as if it were part of the greeting, he now strode forward, slipped his arm under Jerry's free one and thus helped Gail support him to the shed.

“ Don't do that ! You're getting wet yourself,” warned the weary boy, though grateful for the aid. “ Gail's my natural ‘ crutch. ’ ”

“ When I walk on crutches I use two. Two's a pair, and if my girl here and I aren't a pair, just let me know. Wet ? 'Course. I like it. Makes folks grow. And though I be sixty-odd, I hope I ain't done growin' yet. There ! Here you are. High and dry, and as snug as a bug in a rug. ”

Between them, with scarcely the exchange of a word, the old man and frightened girl got Jerry into the inner room of the mill and upon Hiram's own comfortable lounge. Then while he poured out a cup of the steaming soup and held it to the lad's lips, she pulled off his wet shoes and stockings, slipped on a pair of their host's own which stood as if

waiting for this event close beside the roaring cook stove. Then she stripped the blankets from the old man's bed and heaped them on her brother, while the sawyer made haste to heat a soapstone foot-warmer and put it to his guest's feet.

Jerry said nothing. He merely accepted these attentions, feeling the comfort of them and that he was now drifting away from the consciousness of them into a delicious rest.

Gail was delighted to see his long lashes droop on his pale cheek and intimated by signs: "He's going to sleep!" He always did that when he was over-tired and the sight of him lying so quiet banished her late fear.

Not so the sawyer's, though he was too wise and kind to contradict her. In his own heart he realized with keen sadness that the companionable boy, whom he often called his "chum," was fast slipping away from them all. Well, it might be better so. Yes, it was better. Life wasn't a chance affair; and life prolonged for Jerry meant untold suffering.

However, here he still was. Presently he would awake from that deathlike stupor which his twin fancied was but a healthful sleep, and

then he must be made as happy as it was in their power to do. So, moving on tiptoe, the loving conspirators set out the dinner on the oilcloth-covered table, and garnished it with flowers from Gail's basket. Then the host prepared what was for these plainly-reared guests a great treat; he made them a pot of rich cocoa, in which there was no skimping of sugar.

It was scarcely ready when Jerry opened his eyes and, with a long sigh, sat up. He always "waked" after these lapses of his, quite refreshed and strong, and the laugh he now gave gladdened Uncle Hiram's heart and made him doubt his own judgment of the few minutes before.

"Dinner's ready!" announced Gail, running forward to remove the now burdensome blankets from her twin's shoulders. "Dinner at the mill! Think of that, Jerome Graham, and hug yourself for happiness. Heigho! Hark! Hear that? See here, Uncle Hi, you've another guest! He's a contrary donkey and his name is—Balaam!"

There he stood, having walked through the outer room to the door of this one, peering in,

looking innocently guiltless of any offense, and quite as ready for his dinner as were these three humans.

It needed but this touch to send them all off into hilarious laughter, the old sawyer fully as much a youngster as his guests and unaffectedly delighted to have them with him. He was not a busy man at any time. He had outlived that; or, rather, progress had passed him by. The methods and machinery of his old mill could not compete with the more modern ones, up-stream; and though a few patrons still remained to him, these were like himself "old fogies," who cared more to secure lumber from his well-seasoned logs, even if it must be long waited for, than to be more promptly and less honestly served.

When he had a job on hand Uncle Hiram called the services of another "old fogy" in to help, a man who had worked with him through many a year but who was now, like himself, "shelved." Between them they finished the task—some time! But, fortunately for both, they had always lived prudently and were quite "forehanded" enough to make them comfortable to the end of their days.

So there was nothing left to worry about and Uncle Hiram Smith was the happiest man in Millville. His simple old bachelor house-keeping attracted plenty of visitors, so that, although he lived so alone and apart, he was always versed in the latest Millville gossip, and garrulously passed it on from guest to guest.

The twins knew this and, even though they professed to despise the gossip, were human enough to enjoy hearing of the various happenings; so, to-day, when the dinner was over and Gail was tidily washing up, not only the dishes used then but any others she could find tucked away out of sight, Jerry demanded:

“Well, Uncle Hi, what’s the news?”

“Humph! Let me see. Hmm. I reckon that about ‘Big House’ bein’ sold is the latest. Farmer Brown he fetched the word, comin’ to order some them last year’s planks. Got to be some repairin’ done, he thinks, to some the outbuildings. A man by the name of—— Bless my stars! If it ain’t your very own! Graham. That’s what he said. Another crusty old bach’ just like me. Graham.

Yes it was. Joram Graham; said to have more money 'n he knows what to do with. Odd, ain't it?"

It was so extremely odd that Gail dropped her dishpan, feeling as if a bomb had exploded in their midst.

CHAPTER VII

THE DISTURBANCE IN THE GREENHOUSE

As Tom helped his ogre-like visitor to his feet, a voice screamed again :

“ Take off your hat ! Take—off-your—hat ! You WICKED CR-E-A-TURE—Br-r-r-rr ! ”

Instinctively the stranger clapped his hand to his head and doffed the objectionable hat, then looked about to see who had reprimanded him. All he discovered was Tom, holding fast to his sides and doubling himself up with laughter, and a crazy-looking parrot, rushing head downward about her cage. He indignantly demanded :

“ What are you laughing at, you saucy boy ? ”

“ Ain't saucy. Didn't mean to be. You—if you aren't a ogre you're the funniest thing I ever see ! ”

“ Oh ! I am, am I ? ”

“ That's a nanagram. I can make nanagrams, too. Jerry he mostly makes the 'limericks,' but I can nanagram first rate. Who

d' you want to see? the circus? 'Tain't time for that till three o'clock. And, say! We—we're goin' to charge money, now. We have to. 'Cause there's the new burro and the dogs——"

"Dogs? Where?" cried the stranger, wheeling around so suddenly that his coat flew out and revealed his wet trousers.

"Why, in the circus ring; 'course. But, say, mister, you're all clayey water. You shouldn't ought to have set down in Jerry's box."

The old man put his hand to the rear and found that his garments were decidedly damp. Then he ordered:

"Wipe me off, can't you? Here's my handkerchief. Who's Jerry, and why should he keep a box of water to trap people with? Clean me and get me something to sit on. A chair or bench, mind you, not a box of water! Hurry up. Step lively, before the stains set, or I get rheumatism."

Tom set out to obey, but he did not hurry, not in the least. He could not. His attention was riveted upon the red, fat, choleric countenance of the man—whom he had now

decided could not be that delightful creature, a real "ogre"—and upon a strange protuberance adorning that man's bald head. When the stranger wriggled his bushy eyebrows, which he did continually, the queer thing on his bald pate seemed to slip forward and backward in a horribly fascinating way. Finally, he seemed unable to endure the lad's open-mouthed stare, and asked :

"What are you looking at? What's the matter with you? Why don't you help me?"

"What—what's that curious thing a-top your head, where the hair isn't?"

"That? Oh! that's a wen. Didn't you ever see a wen before?"

"No. I never saw a when. I never heard of one. I—does it hurt? Why don't you keep your when still? It—it sort of scares me. It makes me feel all queer in my insides. If you want me to help you, would—would you mind putting on your hat again?"

The stranger laughed. Such a hoarse, gruff laugh as Tommy had never before heard; and the laughter seemed to distort the red, podgy features into a horrible grimace. Probably

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the grimace was intentional, for a sly humor twinkled in the snapping, black eyes beneath the gray brows.

But the hat went on, and Tom's sense of decency returned. He pushed forward the best seat the place afforded, a chair with only one arm, and two rungs gone, and, taking the handkerchief, gingerly wiped the stranger's garments. Then they both sat down and critically studied each other, till, at last, the old gentleman inquired :

“What's your name?”

“Thomas Jefferson Graham.”

“This your home? How many of you are there? Where's the rest?”

“Yes, it is. They's four of us children and two parents. A father and a mother. Two of us has gone to the woods on Balaam, our new donkey. One of us is making tattin', or some kind of trimming. The mother is cooking the dinner. The father, he's the Dominie school-teacher, he—I don't know where he is. Our folks, they got a letter, come by a boy sent a purpose, and I guess it made 'em mad. I don't know what was in it, but I guess 'twasn't nothing nice.”

“Humph!” commented the visitor. “What was that box I sat on, or in? What are you doing here all by yourself? Is your father rich enough to afford a greenhouse?”

Tommy laughed. “Why, sir, you can ask most as many questions as me, can’t you? and my father he calls me a ‘living ’terrogation point.’ A ’terrogation point, if you don’t know, is one them black marks you have to put in compositions. I don’t write compositions yet, I don’t. Father says I haven’t got enough imagernation. Lu, she has to write ’em. She’s beginnin’ to have to, an’ them punctuaters bothers her dreadful. She’d ruther make trimmin’ any day ’n write a composition. Do you like to write ’em?”

“No. I do not. That is, I never did like it when I was young,” answered the stranger, in a manner which seemed quite natural and like other people with whom Tommy was familiar. “Go on and talk. Tell all you know. I—I like to hear you, while I’m resting.”

Now Tommy’s failing was his too glib tongue, and it rarely obtained such license as this—an opportunity which he promptly recognized as “golden” and not to be lost.

Stretching out his fat little legs on the floor where he sat amid the fragments of his clock, he thrust his hands in his pockets and reflected.

“ You asked such a lot I don’t know where to begin. I’ll start in on that box. ’Tisn’t full of water, like you said, not full. Only ’bout half. It’s a old ice-box that Mr. Sampson give Jerry to keep his clay in. It hadn’t no cover, so’s he couldn’t put butcher-meat in it; and, anyhow, he said ’twasn’t more’n pay for the two imerges Jerry made for her front mantel piece. The imerges was copied off a book, after the pictures. The pictures, they didn’t have any clothes on, so brother he didn’t put any on the clay ones. Mrs. Sampson did, though. She said she was most scanderlized, him givin’ a good ice-box for them naked things. I don’t know what scanderlized is, but I guess it’s something not nice. ’Cause it made Jerome say: ‘Silly woman! Let her wallow in her ignorance, then, if she likes.’ But I guess he was ’most mad—he never gets quite, Jerry don’t. Gail does. She gets mad’s a hatter, and she was for startin’ right off to get ’em back, only fa-

ther wouldn't let her. Gail thinks there's nobody in the world like Jerome. They're twins, you know."

"Hmm. Yes. So I suppose. That's a big house I see yonder. Your father must make a lot of money to live in such a big house."

"I don't know. I guess he does get a lot. Jimmy Barlow says it must be much as six hunderd dollars. Jimmy Barlow's father is the minister to our church. He's a nawful nice man. Me an' Jimmy goes together most the time. Mr. Barlow, he likes to have us. He says Jimmy's inclined to be ruther wild an' I'm so well brought up. Was you well brought up when you was a boy?"

"I—I don't know. It's so long ago I can hardly remember."

"Seems real funny, don't it, to think you ever was a little boy like me? I wouldn't believe it, only father says 't every man was little once. He says that's why I must take care now an' not be mean an' selfish, 'cause I have to be when I'm big just the same I am when I'm a kid. Funny, ain't it?"

The old gentleman gave one of his disagree-

able laughs, and remarked in a manner equally disagreeable :

“ Your father must be an extremely wise man ! He must have improved.”

Even to innocent Tommy, ignorant of irony, there seemed something “ not nice ” in the words ; as if his adored father had in some way been maligned. This was enough to rouse his anger, almost as swift to rise as Gail’s, and he answered, hotly :

“ You don’t say that like you meant it. But he is. He’s the wisest, knowingest, best man in this whole world. There isn’t a single thing he doesn’t know. Just you ask him and see ! Humph ! Huh ! He knows more’n anybody in Millville. More’n the minister. More’n the cotton-duck-supe. More’n the storekeeper. More’n anybody just except his very own self. So there ! ”

Tommy had wrought himself up to a high state of feeling, that amused yet also touched the sympathy of his listener ; who, to change the subject, inquired :

“ What are you doing to that clock ? Destroying it ? Clocks cost money and money isn’t to be wasted.”

“This one didn’t cost money. It cost marbles. Jerry made ’em and gave ’em to me and I swopped ’em for the clock. It was meant to wake Jimmy up, but Jimmy he didn’t want to be waked. The alarm wouldn’t go for him but just you hear me make it buzz!”

With that the boy prodded the works of the timepiece till he set its nerve-racking alarm to sounding—not only once but continuously, and the stranger clapped his fat hands to his ears, vainly attempting to make himself heard above the metallic uproar. The case appearing hopeless, he leaned forward above the boy and snatched the clock out of hand, flinging it to the further corner of the place, where it fell with a crash and was still.

“Oh! you! Oh! you—you!” screamed Tommy, enraged. Then suddenly stepped backward and stared in consternation. The old gentleman’s hat had again fallen off and the red top of his head was wiggling worse than ever, with the wen performing a sort of terrifying dance beneath the smooth skin. Or so it seemed to Tommy; who retreated still further and begged: “Oh! please put it on

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again. Looks like the when would fall off!"

"Wish to goodness it would! It ought to have been off, long ago, only I—hadn't the courage."

The hat restored, so was Tom's composure. Besides it had struck his quick ears as strange that any grown man should acknowledge his own cowardice. Also, there had now come a change of expression into the black eyes; a sort of loneliness that impelled the warm-hearted child to offer comfort.

"Say, look a here. Do you know what? When my Jerry gets too much clay on one part his imerge he shaves it off and slaps it on another place where, maybe, there isn't enough. If I was you, that's what I'd do. I'd shave off them eyebrows that are so big and thick and I bet you'd get enough hair to cover the top of your head. I never saw anybody without any hair at all, not without any, 'cept Mrs. Barlow's baby and that hasn't come in yet."

The queer old gentleman looked as if he didn't know whether to scowl or smile. Tom's naive advice had been offered in apparent sincerity, from compassion rather than ridicule;

so the smile won. Seeing it, the companionable little chap slipped his hand into the visitor's and asked :

“ Would you like to go round and see the things first? ’Twon’t be time for the circus, not till three o’clock. We’ve got to have dinner ’fore, and Jerry and Gail come home. My ! hear it rain ! All of a sudden like that ! Oh ! say, you help. You’ve got to. Else Jerome’s wet imerges ’ll get squashed all down. He put ’em under that part the roof where the roof ain’t fixed, ’cause there wasn’t any other place big enough. He made ’em out that new clay father brought him from away beyond the next village, that he thought so much of—it was so fine and hard. Same kind was a-soakin’. Oh ! say ! hurry up ! You’re tall enough to reach and I’m not. We mustn’t let them spoil, we must not. Not Jerry’s ! ”

There was no resisting the child’s earnestness, and the stranger allowed himself to be piloted to the most distant corner of the old greenhouse where upon a shelf high up stood a collection of “ imerges ” which made him open his eyes in amazement, till a dash of

water blinded them. Then he made a very natural movement backward, but was not permitted to go far. Tom's strong little hands were pulling him back, he was even trying to force the man's arms upward to the rescue of the precious models.

Presently, he found that there was no further need of force. His own interest impelled the stranger to preserve those beautiful creations from imminent danger. He began to take them down, hurriedly but with extreme carefulness, and to place them in Tom's grasp with the injunction :

"Take care there, boy! Don't you drop them! Don't you drop a single one!"

Tommy needed no urging to "take care." His admiration of his brother's talent was second only to Gail's own; and he had often waited upon the frail young sculptor at his work, and been commended as the "deftest boy in the world."

In a few moments those pieces which had stood close under the leaky roof were deposited in a dry spot beneath the bench which ran waist high around the room. The rain continued to come down in torrents, but the

stranger was not averse to sitting just where he was and gazing in an absorbed silence upon the evidences of actual genius which were arrayed before him.

Half frightened by the storm, although he was really a brave child, Tommy curled down beside his visitor and remained equally silent. Gradually, over the old man's fierce face stole an expression of rare tenderness. The "images" were doing a wonderful work. Indeed, they almost ceased to be visible to him; for between him and them rose the vision of a boyish face which had once been dearer to him than any other face on earth.

That vision-boy had possessed a gift like this. He had wished to exercise it, make it his message to the world; but he had not been permitted. Then had followed loneliness, dreariness, hopelessness. Long years dragging out their length till here he was an old, old man, with more wealth than he could use, but with not one single human being to love him as that vision-boy had loved—till the fatal break came.

Presently, he felt a touch upon his knee. Tom's curly yellow head had dropped there,

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all unconsciously, and he had fallen asleep. It was his habit to lapse off in this way, at any convenient season when play had tired him, but the stranger did not know that. He only knew that there was something inexpressibly sweet in that pressure on his knee, and with a patience that none who knew him would have believed possible, he sat motionless for a long, long time.

After a time his muscles stiffened and in moving to relieve them he roused the sleeping lad. Tom lifted a drowsy head, gave one scrutinizing glance upward into the red face above him, smiled and stood up. Then he observed :

“Pshaw ! I forgot. You come to the circus too early, didn’t you, so I was going to show you the animals. They’re all in here. I mean them are that don’t live in cages.”

“A circus ? What’s that ? I came to no circus, but for a far different purpose.”

“You did, hey ? Pshaw ! Well it’s raining like guns and you can’t go out anyway. So you may as well see ’em. They’s a mud turtle, marked on his shell so he must be a hundred years old—‘if the marks are genuine,’

father says; ten cats, counting kittens; five white mice; two squir'ls; that parrot what told you to take your hat off, and more besides. Folks—some folks—think they perform lovely. The cats jump through rings, barrel-staves, part of 'em do. The canary rings a bell—— Oh! it's 'most as good as a regular one! Gail trains 'em and folks—some folks—think it's worth as much as a—well, say, a nickel, to see 'em. Should you think a nickel was too much, now we've got Balaam and Juniper Tar and I Don't? You're so old maybe you might know. Only, I can't think of anybody who'd have the nickel. Can you?"

Again to his own amazement and that of all who knew him—had they been there to see—this curious old gentleman did a thing entirely foreign to his nature. With a slow movement of his hairy hand he felt in one, two, three pockets; withdrew the hand and looked into the palm. Twice it came forth empty; was it possible that this "ogre" winked? Actually winked at Tommy, after the third withdrawal?

Did the boy catch a gleam of silver in that

half-opened palm? Who can tell? For, on the mere suspicion of such a thing, wide flew the door leading into the palm-house, the "ring"; and with yelps, barks, and the fiercest of growls, out leaped the great St. Bernard, and landed with his fore paws on the stranger's shoulders.

To the dog's growls echoed a scream of fear. The old man staggered backward, tripped and fell, with the dogs circling around him, wild with delight, while Tommy vainly tried to call them off and to calm his guest's terror. Was there not more than a nickel in danger? Even a whole dime?

Tommy had seen it with his own two eyes; but it had disappeared. Moreover the man on the floor, fighting off the dogs, looked too angry ever to replace it by another. He was even shaking one fist at poor Tommy while he belabored the black-and-tan with the other, and declaring in his gruffest, dreadfulest voice:

"Oh! I'll take it out of you, my boy! I'll take it out of you, setting your dogs on me! Help me up! I say, help me up! Call them

off! Oh! I'll let you know who I am, don't you fear! I'll let you know!"

And thus came Great-uncle Joram to the house of his friends.

CHAPTER VIII

DISAPPOINTMENTS

MR. JORAM GRAHAM had always been an active man. That morning proved that his activity was not a thing of the past. As soon as he could scramble to his feet, he caught up a stick conveniently near, and wildly threshing it about to keep off the dogs, rushed out of the greenhouse, regardless of rain or the fact that he had left his hat behind him.

Mrs. Graham was standing before the back entry door, peering through its upper sash of glass into the storm without and feeling the keenest anxiety concerning Jerome and Gail, exposed to its sudden fury. Also, she remembered the little lad busy in the menagerie, but was sure he would remain there, safe and dry, till the rain ceased.

Then, all at once, a short but bulky figure fairly hurled itself outward from the greenhouse doorway and propelled itself against that where she stood. Instinctively, she

opened the door and stood aside to let it enter ; then recognized this unknown figure as that of an old man, bareheaded, furiously enraged, and almost breathless from excitement.

The stranger halted just beyond the threshold and announced in loud, angry tones :

“ My name is Joram Graham. I’m stopping at the hotel. Tell Philibert to come there. I want to see him. Good-morning.”

The final attempt at courtesy seemed to have been wrung from him by mere force of habit, or by the astonished silence of the house-mistress—too startled to speak. She had just recovered from her surprise sufficiently to open her lips but the visitor did not tarry to hear what might come from them. With an angry snort, he drew his coat close about him and, with head bent against the driving rain, bolted from the house.

Then out from the greenhouse darted, also, Tommy, clinging fast to a wide brimmed hat, screaming after the retreating gentleman :

“ Wait. Wait—— WAIT! Your hat! your hat! They couldn’t hurt you, the dogs couldn’t, I—couldn’t—only playing—oh! hold on, can’t you? ”

The irate old gentleman must have heard, for he suddenly paused on his way to the gate and so abruptly that Tommy, running at top speed, came plump against him—to the child's own downfall and the fresh affront of the other. Probably he would not have paused at all save for the absurdity of going hatless through the street; for he clapped the broad brim over his drenched head and set off again without waiting to learn if Tommy were hurt.

But he wasn't. A little tumble like that belongs in the natural order of a boy's life and he was up like a flash, shaking his small fist in the direction whence his morning's visitor had disappeared.

"Tommy! Thomas! Come right in here out of this rain!" called Mrs. Graham from her doorway and he hastened to obey. The tone of his mother's voice proved that she had not only recovered its use but great vexation along with it; and he had no sooner reached her side than she gave him a little maternal shake and commanded: "Now, boy, explain what all this means."

Tommy wriggled himself free from the hand

on his shoulder and wiped his wet face on his sleeve.

“I don’t know what it does mean. I don’t, no more’n Trimmer, there. He—he came, that whenny man —— Oh! say! you never saw anything to beat! He’s so funny I thought he was a ogre, first off. I for truly did. But he wasn’t. He wasn’t nothing but plain man ——”

“He ‘came’? When and how did he come? Why didn’t you run right in and tell me?”

“Why, mother, I—I don’t know. Didn’t think, I s’pose. Then I liked him. Then I went to sleep and he stayed. When I waked up he was there yet. He’d been nice, nicer than them ogres is in the books. He’d helped me put Jerry’s imerges out the wet. He liked ’em. He liked ’em first rate. Then I was goin’ to show him the animals and I opened the door, and he was goin’ to give me ten cents—I saw it in his hand, I for truly did ——”

Here the lad came to an exasperating pause; after which he laughed and pranced and laughed again till the tears came.

By this time Luella was on the scene and

provoked at this break in the tale, she caught hold of him and brought his amused gyrations to an end.

“Now, you Tommy Graham, you just tell ! what you mean, making mother wait till you get done giggling and not finish? What about that ten cents? And what is so terrible funny, I should like to know?”

Luella usually made herself obeyed and, after another outburst of mirth, Tommy sobered himself sufficiently to relate all the unfortunate happenings in the greenhouse. He concluded :

“They wouldn’t ha’ hurt him, not a mite. They was only foolin’ like dogs will. But he don’t like dogs, I guess. I guess he don’t. He didn’t act that way, and the more he tried to beat ’em off the more they thought he did like it and was just playin’, too. The little I Don’t was almost worse ’n the big one ; he’d get in under and yelp and nibble the cutest ever was ! Oh ! they’re smart dogs, all right. I just wish you could have seen his when ! He can wiggle the top of his head, that man can. You can see it plain, ’cause there isn’t no hair on the top to hide seeing.

Mother, can you wiggle your top? Can you, Lu? I tried but I couldn't, though I'll learn myself how, don't be afraid! Can you, mother?"

"No, I cannot, and I forbid you to learn. Oh! Tommy, Tommy, what have you done?"

The greatly tried woman crossed the room and sat down by the window to reflect on the day's misfortune. Such it surely appeared to her. Any possible benefit to her household which might have accrued from Joram Graham's visit was out of the question now. If ever she had seen an angry man it was he who had bounced into her entry and out again, without waiting to explain what had happened or why he had come, unannounced, at an unexpected hour.

Leaning her head on her hand, the disturbed, overtaxed woman brooded over the perplexities of her life till, finally, her burdens seemed more than she could bear, and with a sudden loss of self-control she began to weep.

Confronted by this unusual spectacle, Luella and Tom stared at one another, at their mother, through the window at the storm, and back again at that bowed head against the

pane. Without in the least understanding what they had done wrong, both children felt a terrible sense of guilt and with a mutual impulse stole softly forward to confess.

"Don't cry, mother, please don't cry! I—I'll learn to wash dishes like Gail. I—I'll help feed the chickens, too, if only you won't cry," begged the little girl, slipping her arm about her mother's shoulder and leaning her cheek against it.

Tom was thus barricaded from her by his sister's plump body, and since he could not encircle the house-mistress he hugged Luella, promising:

"I won't laugh at old men what comes to circuses, I won't never again. And I'll fetch in the kindlin' wood every day without being told. And—and, mother, don't you think that soup's a burnin'? Smells like it was. Don't let it burn, mother, Tom's so hungry."

Nothing could more promptly have brought back Mrs. Graham's composure. With a glance at the clock she hurried to lift the kettle from the fire, and remarked:

"It's past dinner time, anyway. Your father—nobody knows where he is or when he

will be in. Gail and Jerry—oh ! I hope they got under cover somewhere ! If he gets wet it will make him ill. I wish that donkey had never been bought. Then he wouldn't have gone out and exposed himself. Come. Make yourselves ready and we three will eat—if we can ! ”

For the house-mistress felt as if she could not swallow a mouthful. But she could and did, almost the usual number of them. Saturday was soup-dinner day with her as with Uncle Hiram and both were prime cooks, and if she could have known that the absent twins were enjoying a similar feast she would have been truly rejoiced. As it was, after helping the children and herself she set the kettle back in the warming oven to keep hot for the three absentees. And when they had finished, Luella offered :

“ I can wash the dishes, mother, if you want me to. I can do it—if you want me.”

“ No, dearie, you needn't. Thank you just as much. I don't wish your little hands roughened with hot suds, and—I've nothing else to do. I did intend to make a cake for supper but, since we shan't have company

after all, it's not worth while. We can't afford cake just for ourselves."

Tom's countenance fell. But he was not as one without hope, and in his most wheedling manner he observed, as if to the clearing weather outside,

"He might come back. He might. He was a real nice man—some part. He liked Jerry's imerges. He liked 'em real well. If he should come back maybe he'd buy some. Maybe he'll come to look for his ten cents. It would be too bad, wouldn't it, if he did come back and we asked him to supper and there wasn't any cake? I think it would be real too bad."

But Mrs. Graham was not in a coaxing mood, and she ignored Tom's remarks entirely. Her dinner had made her physically comfortable and she set about clearing up with her ordinary spirit. She must go up-stairs, take off the precious linen sheets—not to be slept in by ordinary mortals—and restore her bedroom to its normal condition.

"If I'd known how things would turn out, I needn't have had my trouble for my pains. All my clothes taken out the closet to make

room for his, and he never so much as thinking of coming, I believe. Well, the windows got a good wash, anyway, though I suppose the rain has spattered the outsides again. Don't knit too steady on your lace, Luella. The sun's commencing to shine and you better go out and help Tom get ready for your circus, if you're going to have one. For my part I wish there'd never been such a thing heard of, then this new trouble wouldn't have happened."

"But, mother, it wasn't the circus," corrected the precise Luella; "it was only the dogs, and they haven't exhibited at all yet. They've only just come—hateful things!"

"It's all the same thing," responded the lady, from the top of the stairs, whence she disappeared into her own big bed-chamber.

Tom had already vanished to the greenhouse. The sun had come out, the sky was swiftly clearing, and the air was delightfully fresh and sweet. He sang as he skipped across the grass, cherishing a hope that, after all, that enticing dime which he had seen in his great-uncle's palm might not have wholly disappeared. He would search for it every-

where, and if he found it—what then? It wasn't pleasant to have a fellow's thoughts fetched up that sharp by such a question. He wished—he wished——

“Hello, Lu! What you after here?”

“Come to help get the things ready for the show. Gail ought to be here to do it herself, but she never comes when she's wanted. Besides, I was tired crocheting, anyway, and 'twas lonesome in there by myself. How do you know that old man meant to give you that ten cents?”

“Huh! You after 'em, too? Well, I don't know. I just guessed, maybe. Say, Lu! If I found it, if we find it, do you s'pose we'll have to give it back?”

It was a puzzling question. Luella evaded it by another:

“How could we give it back if he isn't here, and we don't know where to find him?”

“Plague take it! We do know. That's the worst of it. He told mother he'd be at the 'hotel' and she says that's the tavern. Well, let's look, anyway.”

The search was keen and long continued,

but at last rewarded. In a tiny crack where less sharp eyes could not have discovered it, lay the coveted coin. Tom found it where it had flown from its owner's hand at the onslaught of the dogs, and, sitting down by Lu, they planned the many delightful things which might be done with it. Regret grew with the planning, and, in Luella's case, temptation, also.

"Mother said he was awful rich. Awful. I don't suppose he knows how many ten centeses he has got. He wouldn't miss this one. He wouldn't know he'd lost it, nor remember. 'Findings are keepings.' We always play that way at school. It's fair."

Now, all these arguments had been in Tommy's own mind; yet how different one's secret sins appear when they are put into plain, cold words! Luella had voiced the boy's desires and showed him how wrong they were. Rising, he tied the tempting bit of silver in the corner of his rather dirty handkerchief—in itself but a scrap of cotton cloth hemmed round, as economy compelled—and thrust the handkerchief into the very depths of his hindmost pocket. There it

should stay till Fate willed otherwise. Then he looked at his sister with grieved reproach.

“ Well, Luella Graham, I thought you was a honest girl. Huh ! wantin’ to keep things what don’t belong. I guess not. That dime’s the whenny old man’s, and will be give back to him at the first—the first—— What is that big word would fit in there? ”

“ Op-opportu-tunation, I reckon, if you mean the first chance. And I wasn’t no meaner than you were. I only said what you thought.”

“ Well, never mind,” he rejoined, with fine disdain. “ It’s time to fix up, and hurry, too.”

They went to work with a will. Empty rings, which had once been covered with paper, were brought forth and hung on the nail in a post supporting the palm-house roof. A tall box on which Polly-cracker’s cage should stand, while she went through her limited vocabulary for the benefit of the audience, was set in the middle of the “ ring,” and the parrot placed upon it. The white mice, the squirrels and the canary, in their respective cages, were put where they belonged, and Gail’s uniform of a red flannel jacket, cap, and

whip—domestic manufacture—were hung ready for her use, with all the odds and ends of boxes which furnished the seats for the company, duly ranged about the ring. Then they went back to the other room and calling the dogs, whom Tom had with uncommon thoughtfulness locked in, they put these through their trick, to the music of Luella's jew's-harp.

She was the star-performer of their "orchestra" or "band," though Tom could make more noise upon his toy drum. Jimmy Barlow was, also, a member of this famous band, performing upon a mouth-organ or a battered violin, as seemed desirable, and upon condition of free admittance to the show of which he was so important a part. Gail could whistle beautifully and sing like a bird, and some thought she made the sweetest music of them all. Jerry was orchestra leader, and waved a beautifully polished birch rod as a baton. Altogether, it was a very finished and satisfactory company, and, as a rule, the audience filled every seat, so that sometimes, even, there had to be a card hung outside the entrance, marked: "Standing Room Only."

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“I guess there’ll be a big crowd to-day,” said Luella. “Account of the new things. I guess Delly Sampson will come, maybe, and if he does he’ll likely pay real money, three, four, perhaps five, cents. His folks give him a lot of spending money. I wish ours did. I wish I had—if I had ten cents, about ten cents, I’d buy me some that finest thread and tat a whole collar for my school cloak.”

Tom was a generous boy, always ready to part with his possessions to any member of his family who desired them, but he was adamant to this insinuation. Clapping his hand to his rear, the better to stop the opening to his cash-burdened pocket, he pointed the other forward, exclaiming:

“Just you look a-there! Hurray! Hurray! Hur-r-ray!”

CHAPTER IX

A STAR PERFORMANCE

LUELLA hastened to look, as she was bidden, and clapped her own hands in delight. Down over the hillside beyond the brook which bordered their garden were coming Jerry, on his burro, Gail with her arms full of pink-tipped branches and her basket heaped with flowers, and the jolly old sawyer.

Most welcome of all their friends was he; not only because he had the biggest, most delectable of pockets inserted everywhere in his clothes and each holding all sorts of things that young folks like, but because he was, as Jerry said, the "very biggest boy" of them all. The most light hearted, the easiest pleased, the readiest to laugh, of anybody in the world.

"Oh! Uncle Hi! Uncle Hi's coming to the circus! Now we will have fun!" cried Tom, and sped away to meet and greet the party. Luella went only as far as the bridge

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over the brook for beyond that the grass was wet and she hated to dampen her shoes. But her face was more free from its habitual frown than ordinary, and it was with real affection she held it up to receive the old sawyer's kiss.

“Bless my soul and body! I didn't know the buttercups was a-blow so early!” he cried, touching her golden curls with the tip of one work-hardened finger. “Pinks, too! Well, I declare! Roseland's the place for posies, now ain't it?” as he planted a sounding kiss on her rosy cheek. “Buttercups and pinks and blue-eyed grass, all planted by the good Gardener in one little spot! Pshaw! It's enough to set a man singing the Doxology! Let's try it and see how it sounds in this beauty spot!”

Instantly he began it and almost as instantly their four young voices joined in. There seemed nothing unusual in this, and nothing out of keeping with the time and place. Into his deep bass tones Uncle Hiram did, indeed, put more than common “praise.” His young friends thought that he had come merely to see the dogs and enjoy their circus, but, in reality, he had not dared let Gail make the homeward

trip alone with her brother, and he was a thankful man that the lad had reached Rose-land without another lapse of strength. To his own household Jerome's gradual decline was scarcely perceptible, and the younger members observed it not at all. But to his old friend after intervals of absence it was all too painfully evident. However, not his the part to warn and frighten anybody. He left that, as he left everything, to a greater Wisdom than his own; while his share for the time remaining was to fill all these young hearts so full of happiness that they should have no room left for foreboding. So that day he had put aside his own "Saturday afternoon jobs," his weekly scrubbing and furbishing of his home and person, and given the hours to them.

Arrived at the door of the greenhouse he lifted Jerry from the saddle, jokingly observing:

"Want to see if you're as hefty as that birch sapling I cut down yesterday! How hefty are the lot of you?"

Ignoring the swift look of understanding which was in Jerry's eyes he proceeded also to

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lift and swing high first Tom, then a trifle less high the plump Luella, and finally with a prodigious effort—absurdly exaggerated—the laughing elder girl.

“Whew! Miss Abigail! you’re a weighty contract! You’d make good sized planks if you was sawed lengthwise!”

This was received with such uproarious laughter by everybody that Mrs. Graham heard it from her upper room and came out to inquire its cause. Then followed rapid explanations on both sides, earnest assurances from Jerry that he had not taken cold and did not wish to go to bed and be dosed with hot sage tea, and the serio-comic inquiry from Uncle Hiram if she thought he was too old to go to a circus.

“Not in the least. I’ve half a mind to go myself,” she returned, with unusual mirthfulness. After all, though he might be offended, Uncle Joram’s rejection of her hospitality saved her a lot of work and trouble. As in courtesy bound he had written her apprising her, the hostess, of his intended visit, and she had made ready for him. So ready that there was nothing left to do and for once

she was tempted to idle for a space and be happy with her children.

“Make it a whole mind, ma’am, and allow me the pleasure,” said the gallant old sawyer, bowing and offering his arm.

“Thank you. The pleasure is mine,” she returned, with the same affected and mischievous stateliness. Whereupon Tom executed his most hilarious somersault and even paused in the midst of it to stand on his head, till Luella screamed :

“Don’t ! don’t ! you’ll burst all your blood vessels and—and make a dreadful muss !”

Amid a fresh outburst of laughter at this remark they all moved toward the greenhouse, whither another company of childish patrons was proceeding from the gateway to the street. But the home party was first at the entrance and Gail slipped quickly within, to half-close it and prevent the town children entering without depositing the usual fee. Of course, this action also shut out her mother and escort, but he seemed to consider it all right ; for he paused, thrust his hand into one of his many pockets, and demanded :

“What’s the taxes ?”

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“The—what?” asked the doorkeeper.

“The taxes. The ticket. The price of admission,” he answered, with complete gravity.

“Why, Uncle Hiram Smith! The idea! A price from you, for you and mother? How perfectly ridiculous! Walk right in, and Tom, show them the two sound seats,” returned Gail, setting as wide as she could the door which dragged so on its lower hinge.

“Well, I should say it was ridic’lous! Did you ever hear of a young man takin’ a lady to an entertainment and not pay the fines? Tommy, don’t you ever let me catch you doing that when you grow up, or I’ll disown you. Moreover, you ought to be man enough already to know that business is business. What’s the taxes?”

There was money in the sawyer’s hand, more than there had been in Mr. Joram Graham’s, and Tommy answered before he could be prevented:

“Would five—five centses be too much?”

“Thomas Graham! you dreadful boy!” cried Gail, while her mother looked sincerely distressed, and as if her joining in the chil-

dren's "fun" was ending differently from her desire.

Not so Uncle Hiram. It was his habit to carry most of his pocket money in small change. He found it more convenient on just such occasions as this for, though his nature compelled to give often he was not rich enough to give largely. With the same serious demeanor he began to count, picking up a nickel with each count:

"Five times one is five—that's the lady on my arm. Five times two is ten—that fetches me in. Five times three is fifteen—hello, Jerry! pass on! Five times four is twenty—step lively, Miss Luella. Five times five is twenty-five—hurry up there, Thomas! Five times six is thirty—and for you, Miss Doorkeeper! Now, admit."

Gail's cheek flushed with shame, she felt that this was what her small brother called "scanderlous," but a glance toward her twin whose judgment always influenced her own showed that he saw nothing amiss in her accepting these "exorbitant" fees. On the contrary he understood how pleased the old sawyer was to bestow this trifle of spending money

under cover of the statement that they had earned it. Besides, there was already a throng of young folks at the door, the hour for the performance to begin was past, and Gail was too honest to promise anything and not keep her word. The paper tickets she issued always bore the words: "Three o'clock, sharp!"

Five minutes later the show was in full swing; and it did seem as if the animals engaged in it realized the importance of their position and did their very best. Nothing could exceed the dignified gravity of Juniper Tar's countenance as, to the snap of Gail's whip, he circled around and around, reversing the operation only when a signal from the same whip commanded him to do so. This was really astonishing, for he was so recent a member of the troupe that there had been no chance for actual training, and the young ringmaster's face glowed with pride. Little I Don't clung his tightest and slipped from his comrade's bushy tail not more than two or three times, and gave a sharp yelp of delight when replaced in position.

Polly-cracker grew wildly excited by the



THE CIRCUS

uncommon assembly, and shrieked to each and all concerned to: "Take off your hat! WICKED CR-R-EAT-URE!" The canary had never been so hungry nor tinkled his bell so vigorously; the white mice whirled around and around in the wheel within their cage; the squirrels sat up and ate nuts to repletion, using their dainty little paws and coquetting with their bright eyes in almost human fashion. Even Sir Laggard, the venerable mud turtle, for once made his ungainly way across the floor without being prodded thereto by his owners.

But when the cats' turn came, and Mrs. Tabb led her mates sedately and gracefully through barrel-hoop after barrel-hoop, moved continually from place to place so that her leaps were rendered almost indefinite, Uncle Hiram's delight knew no bounds. He laughed and laughed till tears stood in his eyes, till Mrs. Graham joined in, and every youngster echoed him; though to them the trick was not so new as to him.

"Well, well, well! If that don't beat the Dutch! And did you see those silly kittens? Where their ma went there they must follow

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—but stoppin' to play by the road as kitties and tackers will! Well, I declare if this ain't the very finest show I've been to in a dog's age. And I say thanks is due—the thanks of this whole company is due to the young lady, and her helpers, that has given us the pleasure. For Miss Abigail Graham, ringmaster and all-around-young-lady, three cheers and a tiger! All in favor, join in! Hip, hip, hip—hurray!”

If the ricketty roof of the old greenhouse didn't fall that time it was because the shingles which held the broken glass in place had been so tightly nailed by the hand of the schoolmaster himself, who came just in time to join the cheers and to welcome the sawyer to Roseland.

But his coming broke up the entertainment which had, indeed, been given to its last feature, though as formerly it might have responded to an encore. However, there was that in the Dominie's expression which Gail's loving eye interpreted to mean some fresh trouble; and it was well that so joyous a climax should finish the afternoon's sport.

Taking Jerry with them to the house the

grown people departed, and by twos and threes the reluctant younger audience drifted away. There had never, never, been so successful a "circus" since its inception and all were loath to leave the fascinating spot—little dreaming, any of them, that it was the last performance ever to be given there.

Finally they were all gone, save Gail and Tommy, Luella having followed her elders and considering that she had done her full part already. Besides, if she were permitted, there would still be time to run to the store and buy that spool of fine cotton she coveted and which Uncle Hiram's nickel would pay for. She had stopped long enough to obtain the coin from her sister, who did not offer to supplement it by her own piece, as Lu quite expected she would; so, after all, it was with a sense of affront that the little girl regarded the sum, so much greater than she had expected but not so great as she desired.

"If I was a big girl and couldn't make any sort of trimming, and I had a little sister who could, and who hadn't all the money she ought to have to get her material, do you s'pose I wouldn't give it to her? Hmm. In-

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deedy! Well, I guess I would!" ran the Trimmer's thoughts. But it is more than probable that had the cases been reversed she would have been far stingier than Gail was proving.

When only Tom was left to help her restore its accustomed order to the greenhouse Gail called him to her, and said:

"Laddie! If this show is going to be a regular pay affair, as it begins to seem, we ought to have a treasurer. I don't know anybody who can take better care of money than you can, and on behalf of the entire 'management,' as represented by myself, I appoint you to the office. Master Thomas Jefferson Graham, I knight you Treasurer in Chief to The Greatest Show in Millville! Rise up, Sir Knight, and receive the coffers!"

As she touched his shoulder with her whip, Tommy rose from the ground where he had just dropped in pursuit of a stray marble, and fairly gaped his amazement.

"Hold out your hand, sir!" she ordered and slowly, impressively counted into it the five nickels left from Uncle Hiram's bestowal

and the one which Adelbert Sampson had paid. "Thirty cents. See to it that they become no fewer. Indeed, you're such a fine 'trader' I give you leave to invest and reinvest it, till you have doubled your money. But—see to it that it becomes no less!"

With a mock magnificent air she waved her whip, once more touched it to his shoulder, stooped and kissed him, and was gone.

Small Thomas was profoundly moved. He was not accustomed to be appointed to positions of trust, never having shown traits to make him liable to them. For a long time—that is, a long time for his restless self—he stood regarding the money in his hand; then he exclaimed:

"Ain't that the queerest? If it had been Jerry, now, or even maybe Lu—but I guess Lu wouldn't have give it back—but me! just me! Well, sir! If anybody gets this circus money away from me, for nothin', for less'n double what 'tis, he'll have to be awful smart. Smarter'n Jimmy Barlow. Smarter'n Delly Sampson. Smarter'n most anybody. And where'll I put it, over Sunday? Can't do no

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sort of tradin' a-Sunday. 'Twouldn't be right. Jimmy an' me's never let. Sunday's only for Sunday-school an' chicken dinner with a pie to it, an' keepin' dreadful still, so's father can get his nap, and books and things. But goody! If I can't do no tradin' and doublin' up a-Sunday, can't nobody hinder me thinkin' out what I'll trade on come a Monday! And, say. I guess I'll put that there ten cents of that man's right with these nickels. That ain't sayin' I'm counting it in with them, 'cause I ain't. No, siree, Polly-cracker; and you needn't call me a wicked creature, 'cause I ain't. I'm a real good little boy that's just been trusted to be a 'treasurer.' So you quit your hollerin', and let me be."

Then he looked up and there through the glass side of the room peered the snapping eyes of his morning's visitor.

For an instant the apparition startled him, coming so unexpectedly upon the very heels of his thought that the stranger's dime would make such a fine addition to his treasury. Almost he felt that his very soul had been laid naked to the "ogre's" inner vision and he accused of dishonesty. Then he

plucked up courage, and thrusting forth his fat, nickel-laden palm, shouted :

“ Hello, there, you ! Have you come back for your money ? Well, here it is. I found it.”

CHAPTER X

AT THE CLOSE OF THE DAY

THE schoolmaster pushed aside the plate of hot soup which his wife set before him, saying that he was not hungry, and moved away from the table where he had mechanically taken his seat.

“Not hungry, Philibert, and so long past dinner time? Besides you ate so little breakfast—I should think you’d be about starved,” expostulated Mrs. Graham, dismayed by his worried bearing.

“Well, if he ain’t, I am, ma’am. I don’t count it anything ’t I had my dinner before, and a soup one, too, ’cause an old man’s cooking can’t come up to a woman’s, anyway. I’ve a notion to taste a mouthful of that savory stuff, if you’ve got it to spare, ma’am,” said the sawyer, leaving the chair by the window where he had sat down and taking his own place at the table.

There was less hunger than craftiness in this design. He was sure that if he partook

of the refreshment the schoolmaster would be apt to follow his example, for it would be a poor sort of host who would allow his guest to eat alone; and it was one of his maxims that "things don't seem half so dismal when looked at over a full stomach as over an empty one." Quite as plainly as the house-mistress he perceived that the Dominie was, indeed, in trouble.

His action produced the expected result. As Uncle Hiram rather noisily and ostentatiously sucked in his soup, Mr. Graham sat forward and drew his own plate again before him, lifted his spoon and began to eat. Presently, his listlessness disappeared and the contents of the dish with it, and again absently following his friend's example he rose and taking a place beside the open window let the soft air blow over his heavy head.

Then Uncle Hiram leaned forward, laid his hand on the other's knee and commanded:

"Now, man, out with it! If that prime fodder of your good wife's won't drive the megrims out of you it's because they're deeper'n food'll reach. I'll have to be jogging up-hill soon else my pretty Alderney

will think I've run away and got married, and it's more'n likely I can say a word will be of use. Two heads can't squint at anything from the same p'int of view, and different p'int's often discovers different blessings."

"Hmm. I'm afraid that no point will show any blessing in this thing I have to face. I've been to 'board meeting,' this morning. I have lost my school. Our living has been taken away from us."

The news was so terrible that he could not disguise nor soften it in the least. Though rumor had been current for some time he had not mentioned to his wife the possibility of the catastrophe which had befallen. Even at the worst he had hoped to retain his position until the autumn, and this he might have legally done. The spring vacation of a week's length would begin on Monday, and after that would follow the summer term. He could have retained his work and his salary until the close of that if he had chosen, but he did not choose. His successor was to be associated with him, to get "his bearings," so to speak, and this was more than the proud, sensitive Dominie could endure.

“But, bless my soul! The ‘board’ can’t turn you out without due notice!” cried the sawyer, aghast to find the rumors he had also heard so promptly verified.

“Oh! they were just enough, in a sense, those men. I could have kept the school till the end of the year, if I had wished. But—how could I? How bear to see all the young faces I’ve loved turned from me toward a stranger? How endure to have my methods—God knows I’ve tried to keep them up-to-date!—to have them set aside as obsolete by this inexperienced sophomore? No. Dismissal is bitter to bear, but under such circumstances to remain would have been torture.”

Some people called the old sawyer a sentimental man, because he could always discover some hidden meaning in every incident of life. But his sentimentality did not lie along this line. To his practical sense it seemed sheer foolishness to throw away this assured livelihood of the summer term for a whim, a “feeling.” Nor was he one to withhold his opinion when its expression might do good.

“Well, Philibert Graham, you may be pretty

well book-learned but you're a selfish 'Simple Simon,' all the same. What right have you to take away the bread and butter from your children's mouths just for pride's sake?" he demanded.

The schoolmaster did not resent the speech. It hurt, but minor hurts did not count now in the stress of the greater one, and he answered gently :

"Dear Uncle Hi, you mean well but you don't understand. It doesn't matter anyway. It's a question of a few weeks, only, at the best—or the worst."

Gail had "understood," instantly, and she was at her father's side, her arms about his shoulders, and her cheek pressed close against his hair. Though it seemed to her as if the whole fabric of their lives had suddenly collapsed she rallied to his aid, exclaiming :

"You did just exactly right, father. The idea of forcing yourself to stay on where you were no longer wanted—— Oh! how can that be true? Don't you fret. Something new and better will surely come. God won't let such a splendid man as you are suffer without helping him. Don't you believe it."

There was a murmur from the sawyer's lips to the effect that: "God helps those who help themselves," but it was not unkindly meant. Indeed, his friend, the Dominie, might be unwise as he had declared, but the friend's grief was his grief. He glanced out of the window and saw that the day was waning, and his stay must be brief. Before it ended he must find the right word of cheer to utter, for he could not leave this household to such anxiety over the quiet Sunday to follow, without some new hope for the future. At last he fancied he had found it, and rose, saying:

"I'm going up to the post-office, 'fore I climb t'other hill home. Seems if Millville is all 'up hill, down dale,' but it's a likely, lively township, all the same, and there's some decent folks left in it. I'm goin' to see one the decentest, about some lumber he's wanting, and he's the cotton-duck-supe. He has the hirin' of more men than anybody else in the whole factory limits, and what he says goes. He's always liked you, Dominie, and his word's worth more than that of the whole school board put together. He owns the most of 'em, so to speak, and I'm going to get to

the rights of this thing, 'fore I sleep. Good-bye, neighbor. Put your best foot forward and follow it up lively with the worst one, and keep ahead of trouble. That's my rule. When I see trouble a-chasin' of me, I 'cut and run.' Turn my back on it—never give it a chance to catch up, and generally find I'm longer winded than it is, so it sort of flops down and fades out of sight. There never's been a to-day yet that didn't have its to-morrow. You aren't bed-rid, nor a fool—so what's the use bein' downcast? Make my respects to the madam—I see she's slipped away—and ask her to feed you another dish of that fine soup in an hour or so. Nothin' like good victuals to put courage into a man. Good-bye, Jerry. Good-bye, Luelly. Don't trim yourself into a peacock! Abigail, remember I'm your right hand man, case of need, and—good-bye, all."

With the cheeriest of smiles, which to Gail seemed almost heartless, under the circumstances, the sawyer strode down the path to the gateway, where he turned to wave another gay farewell ere he passed out of sight. But the girl had no heart to return the salutation, and would have been highly

indignant could she have overheard his remark to himself:

"I 'low I'm disap'inted in Philibert. What's a man born for but to bear burdens, an' bear 'em erect, head up, shoulders square? But, pshaw! Can't help lovin' him to save my life, yet he's got no more backbone'n a jelly-fish. Pshaw!"

"I think Uncle Hi is real unfeeling. It isn't his trouble, so he can afford to be cheerful. I'm disappointed in him," said Gail, with some bitterness.

"No, no, girlie. Don't misjudge. He does sympathize. He feels our trouble almost as if it were his own. We're different, that's all. And judged by his standards—even by my own, I'm—a failure!"

To hear her father blame himself was the worst, the most unjust of all; and surely this must be only a passing difficulty. They had been so happy, so gay, even mother with them, and such a bit of a while ago! Gloomy things could not be true. When he rose, saying:

"I'll go into the study and begin to sort my papers," she stepped aside, answering only:

“And I’ll just wash these few dishes for mother, then go out and put the menagerie to bed. I guess she’s gone up-stairs to sort the clean clothes for Sunday morning. If you need me, father dear, if I can help you at all, please call me. Oh! I wish you could have seen how beautifully the pet beasties did perform, to-day! Who knows? If school-teaching fails, this family may yet make itself famous in the show business. I’ve always longed to travel around in a wagon and live like gipsies, and we’ve the ‘troupe’ all ready to hand. Hurray! Hear this? ‘The Glorious, Gigantic Graham Gathering and Galaxy of Game! Give a Quarter and Get a Glimpse! Families, One Dollar. One Performance Equals a Liberal Education!’ Couldn’t I get up a handbill to attract? And we may come to it, yet. We may!”

Carrying the soiled dishes into the little back sink-room, she merrily rattled them through the dishpan, more to her father’s approval than her mother’s, could that careful person have heard; for he knew she was only trying to cheer him, while Mrs. Graham would have foreboded nicked edges and called

for caution. However, that task was soon over, and the schoolmaster, having closed his study door behind him, Gail felt herself shut out from any further offers of help in his paper sorting, so betook herself to the greenhouse, and the duties to dependent living creatures. To a moiety she knew just the sufficient supper allowance of each animal, and "to make it go further," was busy cutting the dogs' meat into small bits when the sound of voices behind the palm-room made her stop to listen.

"Why, I thought everybody had gone home long ago! Juniper Tar, who's Tommy talking to?"

The big dog was more intent upon her operations for his supper than outside voices and answered by a short, sharp bark. This set little I Don't into a shivering, quivering, whimpering fit—his own method of announcing that he was nearly starved.

At sound of her own speaking the conversation outside ceased, but presently Tommy rushed in, his face aglow, and his manner full of excitement:

"Oh, Gail, you here? Where's Jerry at?"

“I don’t think he’s ‘at’ anywhere. He’s lying on the lounge in the living-room. He was asleep I think. Don’t go in and wake him. He is pretty tired, I guess. He’s not used to riding, you know, and he got caught in that shower. Don’t, Tommy, please!”

The boy would have made off at the end of her first sentence had she not firmly grasped his blouse and prevented. Ordinary household noises, like dishwashing and home-talk, not personally addressed, did not disturb Jerome. He would doze off in his unexpected way at any and all times when his body was prone on lounge or hammock and wake up after a few moments greatly refreshed. He needed this refreshment now and it was odd that Tom did not forego his own desire at once. But he insisted :

“I must, Gail, I must! They’s a man out there—the whenny man—the Uncle Joram man—that says—— Oh! cracky! What you s’pose? ’T he’ll buy, pay money for, real money, for one them imerges of Jerry’s. True’s you live. He did say so. He’s waitin’ now. He’s looked ’em all over an’ he likes that little farm boy best. The one Jerry did

after me an' a picture. Think of that! I took a chair outdoors for him to set on an' he's a settin'. He don't like dogs so he didn't stay inside long. He lost a ten cents when he was here before an' I thought he'd come back after it. Pooh! He hadn't. He didn't 'pear to mind that ten cents more'n I mind—a chicken feather. He told me to keep it an' I told him I was the new treasurer to the show an' I'd put it with the rest the coffers. He laughed some. I thought he was a ogre first——”

Master Tom had the gift of saying a great deal in a very short time and this long speech had been uttered so rapidly that his sister had but half comprehended its meaning. When she said so he frowned and complained:

“ Well, I can't tell it all over again. What it is—Jerry's got a chance to sell one his imerges an' you're mean not to let him know it. I won't be mean to Jerry even if you are, so there!”

With that the lad broke away from her grasp and darted house-ward, while she hastily tossed the dogs' food to them and ran around

to the outside of the palm-house ; and now, fully as interested as her little brother in the good fortune coming to her precious twin, she bowed to the stranger and bade him a polite good afternoon.

He raised his hand as if to doff his hat but it was already lying on his knee, and without a word he lifted his gaze from the ground and fixed it on the girl's face. She repeated her greeting, adding the question :

“ Are you, sir, as Tommy says, my father's Uncle Joram ? ”

He nodded gravely, repeating her own words :

“ Your father's Uncle Joram. How like you are ! ”

“ Why, have you seen father yet ? I didn't know ; and—and I suppose I may be like him though nobody ever said so before. Mother thinks there's a family resemblance yet calls it slight. Won't you come in the house ? Father's at home now and mother has been expecting you all day.”

“ I've met her. The woman you call 'mother.' I'd rather not come in, yet. I want to see your brother, the boy who did

these wonderful bits of modeling. Afterward, I'll have a little talk, maybe—maybe—with the man you call your father, with Philibert Graham, my nephew."

Poor Gail was mystified ; then decided that the old man before her was either in his dotage or insane. Yet he looked neither. His eye was dark and keen but perfectly calm and his manner was composed. Only his words were peculiar and the girl promptly decided that his manner of speaking was different from most people's yet betokened no insanity. Indeed, she had scant time for considering his meaning or for fidgeting under his critical stare, for just then came Tom, an excited herald, and behind him slowly as usual the tall, slender young sculptor. As he drew near, the old gentlemen's gaze left Gail's face to fasten upon the lad's with an almost hungry eagerness which was more astonishing than aught that had gone before.

Jerry winced under the scrutiny and leaned his elbow on his sister's shoulder, as much for mental as physical support. She was the only person whose expression never suggested pity. She accepted him just as he was and

made neither open nor silent comment on his frailty and she "rested" him infinitely. Even now, as if to add to his confidence, she slipped the hand nearest him into his pocket, with that frank comradery existing between them; and to relieve his annoyance, remarked :

"This is my brother, Jerome Graham. It's he who made those lovely things out of clay, as, some time, he hopes to make them out of marble. Jerry dear, this is father's Uncle Joram—so Tom says."

"Jerome, son of Jerome. Were ever two more alike! Almost as if he had risen from the grave!" murmured the old man to himself but quite loud enough for the others to hear and wonder. After all, though he so disliked personal references, it was a relief when Mr. Graham asked, just like other folks, "Are you sick?"

"Thank you, no. Not at all. I—I suppose I've never been quite as strong—as—as I'd like to be, but that's all. I am well, perfectly well, thank you again. Tommy says you're pleased to admire some of my little things and I have to thank you for that, also."

Mr. Graham commanded Tommy :

“ Bring something for him to sit on. He isn't fit to stand ; ” and when a box was brought he motioned Jerome to place himself upon it, remarking : “ Got the same polite way with you, too. Never could catch the rascal unawares. Always could excuse himself out of any fault, and—he had plenty ! How long you been so sick ? ”

“ But I'm not ‘ sick. ’ I never was. Would you like to look at the models ? or will you not come into the house and see father ? ”

“ Presently. Presently I'll either go into the house and see the man you call father or I'll meet him out here. Till then I'd like to talk and get acquainted with you. I suppose you've heard of me ? ”

“ Y—yes. Not often. Indeed, not much about you until—just now. ”

“ Hmm. I guess I wasn't a pleasant subject to Philibert. We quarreled and haven't met in years. Each of us thought the other in the wrong, as is the way in quarrels, but that's no matter now. Who taught you to make these ‘ statues ’ ? ”

“ Nobody. I just picked it up. I've never

been able to have instruction, though, maybe—I shall have it some day.”

“ You shall ! ”

If a gun had been discharged at him Jerry could not have been more startled, nor his twin more radiant. After all, mother's first disappointment about the expected visit of this beneficent man was as nothing and her hope that his coming might mean a betterment of their fortunes was the great fact. He was queer. He was decidedly queer, and he talked strangely. As if he had, at one moment, forgotten their father's name, calling him “ Jerome,” and at another had remembered it perfectly. Well, no matter! Anybody had a right to be queer who appreciated Jerry's genius and would help to give it a chance of development. “ You shall ! ” Those were magic words and already Gail loved the unprepossessing old man who had spoken them.

She saw his personal peculiarities as plainly as Tommy did, but if they fascinated they did not “ disgust ” her as he had claimed. Still, when he happened to see her looking at the wen on his bald head and hastily clapped

on his hat she liked him better and was much relieved. Then, in a sort of ecstasy, she listened to the brisk talk which now went on between the visitor and Jerome.

One wouldn't have suspected Uncle Joram of being a lover of art, and he told them that he had not been originally ; but that once he had known some one else who was, and that after he had lost that some one he had made up his mind to see if there was anything in the business of chipping images out of stone which should make a man throw up a fortune for the sake of prosecuting it. Then he had begun to understand, and, at last, when it was too late, he understood fully. Perhaps if he had not been so dense and pig-headed in the beginning there would have been no sin, no injustice, and no regret to follow.

This was all interesting talk but, as Gail thought, it led nowhere in particular. There was no further mention of "buying" and her heart sank. If Jerry could sell something he could get books which would help him almost as well as real teachers, and if father had lost his school, the money would be needed for other things too. She made a little impa-

tient gesture and, realizing that the dew was falling, and that Jerry should not be sitting out of doors exposed to it, she said :

“ If you want to see the things, we'd better go into the greenhouse now, before it gets too dark.”

Mr. Graham rose at once, but he made no step toward that place. What he did was to direct :

“ Go in, all of you, and send that man you call your father out to me. I'll give him just five minutes to come.”

One spirit of indignation rose in them all. This was a teasing, tyrannical old man, who talked crazily as insolently, and whose manner of speaking of their father was the height of insult ! Gail swept him her profoundest courtesy, Jerome bowed, and Tommy glared ; but neither anger nor irony moved the now pre-occupied old man who saw nothing but an unforgotten face of which Jerry's was the youthful image.

CHAPTER XI

DARKENED DAYS

JERRY delivered the message which had been given them, softening its rudeness as much as might be, but to urge haste was not necessary. The instant he heard that the elder Mr. Graham was on his premises, the Dominie tossed aside his papers and went out. His face expressed fresh annoyance and he looked shrewdly into his children's eyes, as if to learn from them what sort of interview theirs had been with his unwelcome caller. He saw that they all seemed vexed and Jerry disappointed and, closing his lips with a firmness that suggested no "jellyfish"—to which the sawyer had likened him—he sought his uncle.

He was back again, very shortly, and reported to his wife :

"Mr. Joram Graham has bought one of the largest mills in town. He's bought 'Big House,' too, and is going there to live. But I wish to say right here and now that that does

not mean there is to be any intercourse between his household and mine. Years ago he did one I loved an intolerable injustice, which he still refuses to right. Until that is done we cannot be friends. Cannot. I am sorry. It's the wretchedest thing in life—a family quarrel. But there are some quarrels that are righteous and, without further explanation, you must believe me that this is such. Let us not discuss him any more and forget him if we can."

Having delivered himself of these statements, the Dominie stooped and kissed the tear-stained eyelids of his wife, thus mutely endeavoring to reassure her; and from this unusual demonstration between their parents the elder children quietly turned their eyes, but not so master Tommy. As his father re-entered the study and again closed its door behind him, in itself an unusual circumstance, the boy demanded:

"What's father a-kissin' you for, mother? Has anybody hurted you? Has that whenny man?"

"Tommy! Father said we were not to mention him," reproved Luella from her stool

beside her mother's sewing chair and softly slipping her own little hand within the matron's.

"Oh! bother! I'd like to have my bread and milk and go to bed! I get so tired taking care of all that circus an' bein' treasurer to it. Besides, if I can't talk about him I can look at his ten centses and count it, can't I?"

"Come on, laddie, I'm tired, too, and I've your own notion for early supper and bed," said Jerome, with a yawn. He had seen Gail's tender eyes scanning his disappointed face and he longed to hide it in the secrecy of his own room. Tommy's room, too, of course, but Tommy didn't interfere. He was always asleep as soon as in bed and gave no further trouble till daylight.

"Very well, Thomas. But don't forget that tub of water in the shed entry. Saturday night, you know."

"Pshaw! mother! I'm tired. And I ain't dirty. I ain't dirty a mite. I washed all over last Saturday night that ever was. Besides—be ——"

"Besides what, Thomas?"

"I—— Wull, wull, I went a-swimmin'

with Jimmy Barlow last Wednesday, so that ought to make up for another whole week."

Mrs. Graham paused with the bowl of milk in her hand, then sternly said :

"Very well, son. That settles it. You will not only take your bath to-night but every night for a week to come, and you will go to bed without your supper. If you need to be punished, to make you understand that when I say 'no' I don't mean 'yes,' I will punish you. It is too early in the season for swimming, and you know that you are never allowed to go without some older person with you."

"Oh, mother! Now! Well, he was older. Jimmy Barlow's three whole months older'n what I be. Ask him and see. And—and—I'm awful, terrible hungry. Nothin' but soup for dinner an' soup never does last its full-up feel more'n no time."

"Be thankful, boy, that you had as much as soup. As things seem now your next dinner may be what Uncle Hi calls 'wind pudding.' Go on. The soap and towel are on the shelf. Come, Jerry, Gail, Luella. Your suppers are ready."

The three privileged ones sat down to their simple meal while Tommy dragged his unwilling feet toward the shed entry and bed. But he was not without comfort. In his own little bureau drawer reposed a bag of last autumn's chestnuts, almost as hard as bullets, and one fine puppy-nose apple. Both nuts and apple were what the boy called "swops" and never had he been more thankful for any "trade" than for that which would now stop that horrible all-gone feeling in his stomach. Secretly he knew his mother did not anticipate his eating anything to-night, even flinty chestnuts, but openly she had not prohibited them. So he made as good a supper as he could upon them, munching them after his brother had also come to bed, and breaking only one tooth in the operation.

"Well, Tom, do the worms taste good? Will you find a bed full of chestnut shells comfortable?" asked Jerome, after there had been some moments of silence on his part and the culprit had fancied himself undetected.

"Huh! You awake? I'd like to know how you know everythin' goes on! A feller can't even wink without you know it, Jerry

Graham! An' I wish—I wish—— What made you say that 'bout worms, anyway? I hadn't thought of 'em, 'fore, and now—— Now I feel all sort of squirmy inside. Jerry, do chestnut worms live in hard chestnuts? Awful hard ones, that you break your teeth on?"

"Laddie, have you broken a tooth? I'm sorry. But I fear worms do continue to live in nuts after they have grown hard, because quite often, lately, I've found some of the white, pulpy creatures on the top of our bureau and they could only have come from that bag of yours, when you've been eating some. Never mind, though. You don't know that you've swallowed any to-night, in the dark, and I shouldn't have mentioned it except I fancied you'd forgotten what father explained about the 'spirit' and the 'letter' of the law. Now, good-night and go to sleep."

Tommy derived what comfort he could from these remarks and did promptly fall asleep; but his dreams were troubled ones and in them he had to attempt, over and over again, the hopeless task of training wiggley chestnut worms to perform in the menagerie,

only to see them laughing in his face as they triumphantly devoured all the nickels in his treasury.

The Sunday morning brought more of the showers which promised "May flowers," but rain or shine made no difference in the church going habits of the household. All went, even the mother, whose custom it was to provide a better dinner than ordinary for the best day of the week, and who usually remained at home to prepare it. This time, however, she decided that the cold soup-meat was all sufficient for a family which might soon be reduced to even less palatable food than that; and who felt that she must get away from home for a little and seek what help she could in public worship.

Jerry rode on Balaam. This the Dominie decreed, though the others wondered and even the lad demurred, shrinking from any new thing that might call attention to his weakness. But, all at once, it seemed to the whole household that the gentle, yielding schoolmaster had begun to assert a strong will, against which even his wife's protests were useless. As if the trouble that had overtaken

him had roused a new spirit within him. It had. For the time being indignation was rendering him stern and arbitrary and, naturally, those nearest to him were first to feel the change in his temper.

Besides, he alone appeared to observe how swiftly Jerry's strength and color faded, though he would not force the lad's own attention to the fact, and he covered his command that Balaam should be saddled by the comment :

"I bought him for our boy to ride, and as it looks now, we won't be able to keep the donkey after the summer ends and grass is gone. So, to get our money's worth, use him whenever possible."

So Jerry rode to church, Gail walking beside the little burro, and resting her hand upon the pommel of his saddle, ready to ward off from her sensitive twin any chance remarks of people they met. And, Sunday past, the schoolmaster employed his week's vacation by collecting all his personal belongings from the schoolhouse, and he was himself surprised to find how numerous these were. All along, during the many years of his labor, he had been accustomed to provide for his pupils' use

globes, charts, maps, and even expensive reference books, which the prudence or procrastination of the school board delayed to furnish ; and the conveying of these to Roseland was a work of time.

Many an eye regretfully watched him and Gail, passing down the street on these errands, and noticed how, as the days slipped by, his first half-defiant bearing altered to a meek resignation, his face saddened, and his shoulders drooped more than was their wont. But the girl still held her head high and flashed angry glances here and there, upon such as she considered had been instrumental in her father's discharge.

With that, too, had come the loss of her own cherished dream of one day becoming his assistant in the beloved school. To make herself capable of the position had been her great endeavor and because of her diligence she had long ago outstripped her own class and gone on by herself, under his continual supervision. In everything save her devotion to study she was a careless, happy-go-lucky girl, the prompter of school-fun, but in that she was a marvel to her mates.

“Now, after all, what’s been the use of so much book-stuff, father dear? To think I’d almost finished geometry and was ready for ‘trig’! But who’d employ me in any other school or believe that such a harum-scarum could conjugate a Latin verb! Now, I’ve done. If learning means only—only what has come to you after all these years I’ll give it up. For the rest of my days I’ll devote myself to something folks can see. Learning is all in your insides, and I begin to think that nobody cares for what’s inside a body’s head. What can you do with your hands——Father, may I go to work in a mill?”

The Dominie paused so abruptly in his swift walk down the steep street that her arm slipped from his shoulder and a book from the pile he was carrying. There was angry reproach in his tone as he cried:

“Abigail! Don’t mention such a thing as that again!”

“But, father, why not? I could earn a lot of money. In the carpet-mill some of the ‘setters’ earn as much as twelve dollars a week. Twelve whole dollars! What do you think of that? Even beginners get something and

I could learn to do the work. I've been inquiring about it —— No, please don't hold up your hand to stop me till I've said my say! Nor don't look so shocked. I'm no better than other girls and somebody must earn money. I've talked it over with mother and she wasn't surprised. She even thinks of doing something herself. She says she was a dressmaker before she was married, though I didn't remember hearing about it, and that she may take up her trade again here. Of course she'd have to buy patterns and —— Why, father! Don't look so distressed! I won't talk about it any more, now, if you object; but you please keep thinking, dear, even if I don't talk. I shouldn't mind. I—I shouldn't mind it hardly any except—for Jerry. I should hate the being away from him all day, and —— ”

Again and more peremptorily the Dominie's hand was uplifted, and Gail said no more; yet when she had reached home she asked her mother :

“ Isn't there something else that troubles father besides losing school? He doesn't look nor speak like himself; and sometimes he

stares at Jerry or me as if he were on the point of telling us something. We've both noticed it, though Jerome begged me not to disturb father by mentioning it to him. Is it anything you can tell me, motherkin? And is it anything to do with that old Uncle Joram?"

Mrs. Graham looked up from her sewing with a sudden, startled expression and, for a moment, seemed on the point of explanation. But she contented herself by answering, and unfortunately adding to her daughter's curiosity:

"Whatever secrets your father has he will keep to himself. I have no right to tell them. He is in trouble and it is more than the school trouble, too. How it will end, I don't know. I always thought he was dreadful easy but, lately, he's as stubborn as a mule; as Balaam was, yesterday, when Jerry tried to make him travel the way he didn't want to. There, don't talk any more, and about this mill work. Of course, if he won't do what he ought, I suppose you'd rather try that than starve. There's Jerry to consider, too. But—— Oh! if Philibert had ever tried some other business than school-teaching! Then he wouldn't have

been kicked out in his old age and things—things wouldn't have been so hard!"

Tears sprang into the eyes of the greatly worried woman, who impatiently brushed them aside and Gail waited a moment before she could answer gently:

"But father isn't old, motherkin, and he'll surely, surely get another school before the fall. He says there are agencies to supply teachers though he's afraid no board would want a man that's 'failed.' If we could only make him feel differently about that! He hasn't 'failed.' He's just the same, splendid, clever, all-wise man he ever was. It's just that stingy lot of men who have the hiring of a principal and want to save money at the expense of their children's souls. Because the chief thing in education, my father believes, is to train our souls to high and noble things. Oh! there may be lots of men can teach books but there's only father who can teach souls! That hateful sophomore, who's coming, can't. I know by the looks of him, with his mat of football hair and his big hands and his horrid broad shoulders! Huh! He!"

Mrs. Graham smiled grimly. She felt as if

her daughter were upbraiding her for her want of faith in her husband and the feeling was not agreeable. So she answered, stiffly :

“ Oh ! of course, I know you sympathize more with your father than with me, though I’ve tried to do my duty by you faithfully as I had sense to guide me. As I had sense. Some folks aren’t all brains, like you and him. It’s natural, though, you should side with him. I’m not denying that. But, if you’ll step down off your high horse for awhile and make a pot of suppawn for dinner, it might be something to the purpose. The water’s a-boil, and I’ve salted it. All you need do is keep it stirred well from the bottom. Don’t get mooning and let it stick. We can no longer afford to spoil our victuals by carelessness.”

Gail longed to retort : “ As if we ever could ! ” but her surprise and hurt were too deep for words just then. Why was it that between her mother and herself there was always this little separation of thought and sympathy ? With Jerry she felt “ just one ” ; and with her father almost as close. But with the mother, who should by nature have been

nearest of all, there was always "a little bridge to cross" before they met in mutual understanding. Nor did she like this outspoken criticism of the Dominie by one who should have been first to defend him; and, altogether, it was a very unhappy girl who silently left the cool piazza where the house-mistress was sitting, to stand over a cooking stove and stir the great kettle of suppawn, "that nobody likes when it's done!"

However, it is probable that into the vigorous motion of her arm went some of the anger from her heart; and the long-continued exercise if heating to her body was cooling to her soul. The bubbling mess of pudding, that snapped at intervals and sent a hot morsel to her hand, began to represent something better than "mush and milk"; and she explained to Mrs. Tabb, who always escaped from the menagerie when there was cooking going on in the kitchen:

"I reckon, Ma'am Puss, that I'm a good deal like this Indian meal. A little bitter in the mouth and sort of scratchy to swallow. So I have to be cooked to make me eatable, even if I can't be made agreeable when cooked.

Life's boiling me and tossing me and—and ought to be softening me, only I haven't got that far yet—and I fling out hot spatters of half-done judgments and hurt people like a burn. I've hurt my precious father and now my mother, and—— If you don't get out from under foot you'll get hurt, yourself, Mrs. Tabb! Moreover I suppose if I were my mother and my mother were me I'd be provoked with me—with her—where was I 'at,' Miss Cat? Anyhow, I think this stuff is done, even if I'm not; so if mother has nothing more for me to do I'll hie me to my labor over the butcher's book, and a visit with my Jerry at the same blessed moment."

Then followed one of the long delightful talks in the old greenhouse which Gail was never to forget. The other young folks were off somewhere, visiting their own playmates, and there was nothing to disturb the happiness of the twins.

"We call our times together 'talks,' sweetheart, but I've observed before that all the talk is mine and all the thinking yours. Yet I think I should burst—if I didn't have this relief. With father so blue, and silent, and

shut up in himself, and mother so—dare I say cross?" she asked.

"I presume you dare. There's not much you don't. I'd love to see mother rich and having everything she likes best. I think nobody could accuse her of crossness then, and I don't blame her now. She has much to do, so little time for 'fun,' of any sort, and the plainest things around her. I consider that she's been wonderfully kind and patient, after all, and if her tongue is a bit sharp to the rest of you, now and then, I don't remember that it ever was to me. Be good to mother, Gail, and never impatient; never, not once."

The girl had been adding up columns of badly formed figures which Mr. Sampson's big fingers had hurriedly set down and doing this even while she talked; but she paused now to lay her hand on her brother's, hanging limply over the edge of the hammock where he lay, and to remark:

"My boy, if this is one of your preachy days, please omit! I've come to you for comfort—that is, for praise!—and if you haven't any on hand please go to sleep while

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I make this column add twice alike. It takes a wise Gail to tell Mr. Sampson's eights from his threes and his ones from his sevens. Go to sleep, brother. You need it."

Jerry laughed and obediently closed his eyes while she stooped and daintily kissed his pale cheek. Always her touch upon him was of the lightest, knowing well how he shrank from a heavier one; and he opened his eyes once more to say, as if all his soul was in his voice:

"Don't think but that I 'praise,' my precious sister!"

Then he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII

REVELATIONS

JERRY fell asleep and waked no more.

Over the shock, the horror, the agony of that fact it is impossible to dwell. Any sister who has loved a brother as Gail loved her twin knows without description what she suffered, and any other may thank God for her lack of knowledge.

The great sorrow dwarfed all minor ones. Now it seemed not to matter at all that the schoolmaster had lost his position, that already there must be use made of the small sum of money Mrs. Graham had put aside for "a rainy day," or that a "family quarrel" had cast its shadow over them. The "rainy day" had come, and it was the Dominie's satisfaction to know that, in that dark hour, only those who had always cared for and loved Jerome had met the last sad expenses.

Indeed, there had come a letter from Mrs. George, offering an advance of money, but this had been promptly, though courteously,

declined ; and another letter sent by Uncle Joram had been returned unopened. Against this last action Mrs. Graham had vigorously protested, but her husband had not yielded to her judgment. She had even appealed to Gail to aid her in her argument, saying :

“ There’s no need to be foolish even if we are in trouble. It’s been difficult enough to scrape together what I did and I had felt some comfort in thinking we had that much to live upon till your father gets a new school—if he ever does ! If Uncle Joram has the will to help us it’s like flying in the face of Providence to refuse his help. I wish you’d speak to him ——”

But poor Gail had looked up as if she had not heard, or, hearing, understood. As for speaking she was almost past that. During those first dreadful days she lived in a continual hush, listening for that dear voice whose last spoken words had been : “ My precious sister.” She did not cry, she could not ; and she moved about in an abnormally gentle manner, doing everything she was directed to do, neglecting no accustomed duty, and uttering no complaint.

But it hurt her intolerably to have friend or neighbor offer their condolence and she shrank away to some hidden spot each time a visitor came to Roseland. The visitors were now many. To the father and mother the sympathy of their neighbors was very dear, nor had they realized in their quiet lives how important those lives were really considered by their fellow townsmen.

As for Luella, though deeply sharing the household sorrow, she yet found great satisfaction in being called upon to help do the honors of the occasion. Dressed in her Sunday frock, she was ready from morning till night to open the door to callers, to summon her mother into the study, and to hover near—available for any chance errand or bit of outside gossip.

It was Tommy who came nearest entering his elder sister's mood in those dark hours, and he was the only one from whose presence she did not shrink. Like her he could not talk. Unlike her he could and did weep, copiously, suddenly, with heart-broken, shuddering sobs which touched her as much as anything could touch her just then. She did not

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try to comfort him in words, but, sometimes, when his paroxysms of grief were most violent she would lay her cold hand on his curly head and keep it there until he quieted.

In silence they ministered to all the "pet beasties" which, on their own part, seemed to realize the altered moods of their attendants and to give little trouble; then, still in silence, they sat together in the old greenhouse that, to both, would forever seem a sacred place because of that which had occurred there.

So the first week passed. Slowly, as if it were a week of years instead of days, and still Gail's eyes were dry and her face colorless; and though she dutifully took her place at table when bidden she could eat but a morsel at a time and made her early excuses to absent herself.

Mrs. Graham would find the tears rising in her own eyes as she nodded the desired permission to "Excuse, please," and the Dominie felt his own food choke him. He was a sorely perplexed man; frequently opening his lips as if to unburden his mind of some hidden matter, and as often closing them again, fearing the right time had not come.

However a change came when there arrived the usual spring box from Aunt George. It bore a different address from formerly, Gail's name instead of Jerry's, and with a hope that this might startle the girl out of her unnatural calmness, she was summoned to open it.

A frown showed that she had observed this difference but she said nothing, though her fingers trembled as she untied the knotted string in the painstaking way her mother approved. Then she folded the wrappings with equal care, delaying as long as possible to raise the cover of the big box, knowing that for the first time there would be no boyish suit of clothing accompanying her own girlish things. But she was wholly unprepared for that which was enclosed ; and as she lifted from its tissue paper a plain black costume she exclaimed in surprise : " Why—what ? "

They were all standing by and Mrs. Graham quietly took the frock from the girl's hands, and regarded it with critical satisfaction, but she kept her eyes averted as she remarked :

" This is of much finer quality than usual and in excellent keeping. It looks as if it would fit you."

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Gail said nothing. To the little gown was added a black jacket, a simple hat, and a pair of gloves—kid—all of the same sombre hue. There were even a few black-bordered handkerchiefs, and Luella's finery-loving soul could not refrain its admiration.

"Oh! aren't they nice! You never had such nice things before, did you, sister? You never had a pair of kid gloves in your life, nor I. The first thing I buy, if I ever have money, will be a pair of just such gloves as those. How soft they feel."

For so well grown a girl Gail had a remarkably small hand, while that of her sister was of ordinary size for her age. It was perfectly natural for the recipient of the coveted gloves to toss them forward with the remark:

"Then take these, if you want them. I don't."

"But Abigail Graham! I can't wear black gloves, even if they should fit. Nobody is to wear mourning but you, so mother says."

"Why—why—what do you mean? Because I loved him best? I feel so. Yet—a mother—— Oh! I've seen it all along! Nobody cares, nobody cares but me!"

With a sob that was almost a shriek the unhappy girl flung the box away from her and covered her face with her hands. Only an instant later to remove them and to demand, with keen scrutiny of both parents' faces :

“What does it mean? Why am I to be swathed in this horrible black stuff, yet none of you to share it?”

Luella also looked puzzled. She had accepted her mother's announcement of the fact without inquiring its reason ; but Tommy had an answer ready :

“'Cause, Gaily darlin', 'cause you and him is twins. Twins always do dress alike and ——”

He was about to add something more distressing had not his mother laid her finger on his lips.

The Dominie took Gail's hand, saying :

“Come. There is something you should know and now is the time.”

When the study door had been shut upon them he placed her in her own low chair beside his big one and began a story, so often rehearsed in his own mind that it sounded like a page from a book :—

“Once upon a time a man died and left two sons. To the elder son, Joram, he bequeathed most of his possessions, including all of his ready money. To increase this money Joram went into business and prospered. He never married.

“Philibert, the younger son, did marry and struggled along on the small, worn-out farm, which was his own inheritance, till his wife died. Then he took their three little lads and sought employment in his brother’s factory. This was grudgingly given but had not to be long continued, for Philibert soon followed his wife out of this world and the rich manufacturer was left with three orphans dependent upon him. There was no other relative who could receive them, so he squared his jaw and set his bachelor wits to learn the duties of a parent. He summed up these duties in a few words which only George, the eldest orphan, fully understood :

“ ‘ I shall raise you as fast and as cheaply as I can till you are eighteen years of age—when each must shift for himself ; and there are just two things you must learn by heart. First—my word is law ; and second—it takes

a dollar one whole year to earn five cents. Now go to school and don't waste your time, for it flies.'

"It did fly. Almost before they knew it the little lads were grown. When George's term of dependence ended he was already a clerk in the great factory, and, in character, the very counterpart of its head. Just before he was eighteen Jerome, the next younger boy, ran away. He had been the only one of the orphans to be really loved by his guardian, from whom he now cut himself off by a bitter quarrel. But when his wardship was over, Philibert, the youngest and his father's namesake, gratefully thanked his uncle, packed his valise, and set out to work his way through college. To him knowledge seemed the noblest achievement of life; and, with book or fishing-rod, to lie beside a forest stream—dreaming great dreams which never could come true—its most adorable delight."

"And that dreamer I know! It was you, father dear!" cried Gail, with her first show of interest in anything.

"Yes, girly. I was the dreamer; but—I am not your father."

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“What? What! What is that you say?” she demanded, springing up, and now with interest fully roused.

“I am your uncle, not your father. He was that gifted, beloved, runaway lad, my brother Jerome, whose name your own Jerome has borne.”

Gail dropped back to her seat, feeling as if the solid floor was reeling beneath her feet and with a terrible chill of distrust and suffering sweeping over her. At last she forced her dry lips to ask :

“Where is he, that other—my real father?”

“Dead, long ago. Dead in your infancy.”

“And my mother? I suppose there was a mother—real, too!”

The schoolmaster sighed at the tone but he was not surprised. All along he had known that this revelation would be a bitter one for both and would not have made it had it not become necessary. Better for her to learn the truth from him who loved her so well, than for a stranger to impart it more rudely.

“Yes, my child, there was a mother, fair and lovely, I believe, although I never saw her. She died in England, where she was

married, and you, her twin children were born."

"Dead? Dead! Everybody belonging to me dead! Then I might as well die, too. Oh! I wish I could! I wish I had, when Jerry did, before I ever heard this dreadful story or knew we had been brought up in a lie. A lie! Oh, father—or uncle—or whatever you are—how could you, how could you! And I have believed in you, loved you as the absolute truth!"

"Yes, dear. Will love me still and always, I trust, when the shock of this news has passed. Believe me, it was all done for the best. To shield you till you were old enough, strong enough, to bear the truth. Done for you and for that other Jerome who was as like your brother as it was possible for two to be, save in the matter of physical health. You will understand and be glad, after awhile."

"Glad? I? Because I have been reared in a falsehood? Forgive me if I am disrespectful, but—you've always talked as if the truth was above everything in the world and a—a lie—the lowest down thing possible. Acting on what you said—I've always de-

spised a falsehood and —— But now! Oh, Jerry, Jerry! My one perfect darling! I cannot, cannot live without you!”

Down she sank on the very floor and for the first time since her bereavement tears came. Such floods of them as seemed to wash away her indignation and to clear her thoughts, though not to lessen her grief.

The schoolmaster sat beside her silent and with head bowed, though with no look of shame on his fine face. Her frantic accusations had disturbed him not at all, for he still knew that his object had been only her greatest good, and he waited her recovery with the same tender patience he had ever shown her. Finally she raised her head and, though still avoiding his eyes, asked brokenly :

“Will you tell me why—why this was all done?”

“Dear one, I cannot. Not yet. Maybe never. You must still trust to my love that this, also, is for the best. Some time, I believe, all this mystery may be made clear—as great a mystery to me, in some respects, as to you.”

“How old were we when you—adopted us?”

“ Mere infants, less than one year old.”

“ Had you been married long? Was mother—I mean your wife—was she willing to take us and help—deceive us?”

“ Gently, Gail. I was not even married. She was brave enough to take me and my charges, to cast in her lot with ours. That it has not been an easy lot, I know; but few would have borne it so well. We owe much to Mary, my faithful wife.”

“ ‘ We.’ Yes, I suppose ‘ we ’ do. But —— Let me go now, let me go! To Jerry. I must tell it to Jerry!”

With a cry of utter misery she burst from the room, from the house, and sped with frantic haste up over the hillside to the cemetery on its crest. There she flung herself headlong on a freshly sodded mound, moaning her desire :

“ Let me come to you, my darling! My one, my own only beloved! All the rest are false—and I—I cannot bear it. I cannot!”

She did not hear the footsteps drawing near. She heard nothing of nature’s sweet sounds all about her, and knew nothing save her own

wretchedness till a kind voice close by was saying :

“ Ah, yes you can ! You'll live to do our dear boy proud, my little girl ! Uncle Hiram knows, and he's come to take you home.”

CHAPTER XIII

AUNT SARAH AT THE MILL

THEN she felt herself gently lifted to her feet and found a bunch of wild flowers slipped into her hand. Another bunch of the same sort lay on the narrow mound, though these were faded and had been placed there hours before. They were of one of the many kinds of violets growing on the wooded hill behind the old sawmill, and possessed the rare gift of fragrance, and Jerry had loved them beyond all other forest blossoms.

Once Gail had laughingly told him :

“I believe that you believe that this special variety grows just for you ! There isn’t another spot in all the countryside, so far as I’ve explored it, where sweet wild violets do grow ; so let’s name this species the *Violaceæ Jeromenia*—the Jerome violet.”

Thereafter they had called it “Jeromenia,” and it had been her great delight to come upon a bunch of it and carry it home to him.

As now the exquisite, faint perfume touched

her nostrils, the tears came to her eyes and blinded her when she stooped to lay the fresh blossoms on the ground.

“ Dear Uncle Hiram, you’ve been here before—I know by those others. Jerry would thank you, and I—I thank you for him.”

“ You’re more than welcome, deary,” answered the old sawyer, as well pleased by the natural expression of her grief in tears as by her gratitude for his gift. “ Yes, I’ve been here every day. I couldn’t keep away, bein’s I had to learn what our boy wanted me to do.”

“ What are you saying?” demanded Gail, greatly astonished.

“ Just that. I loved him, too, you know; after an old man’s fashion and one that’d had had no other son to comfort. I love him still so well I want to keep on doin’ just what he likes best. We had many a talk together, him an’ me, an’ his wisdom concernin’ life was wonderful, it often struck me. I’m kind of a raspy old creatur’, at times, an’ a mite stubborn in my judgments; but the way that dear laddie could talk me out of my hatefulness into charity was nothin’ short of marvelous. The purest heart an’ the cleverest brain ever

put into a fifteen-year-old body, our Jerry had. Has 'em still, only carried 'em out of sight. This very morning I was as mad as a hatter, 'cause a man that owed me some money, which I need to buy lumber with, had sent word he couldn't pay now, seein's he'd just had to get a new horse an' buggy to take his wife out ridin' in. An' he's one them shiftless fellers that never is out of debt, never was, an' never will be. Always 'robbin' Peter to pay Paul,' an' no more need of a buggy-wagon than I have of two sawmills, seein' I haven't got business enough to keep one runnin'. However, off I started through the woods to that man's house, ready to give him 'hail Columbia!' to a short metre tune, when I come across a patch of these posies; and the sight an' scent of 'em was just like a voice sayin': 'Now, Uncle Hi, go slow. You know that man's wife is sick and needs buggy-ridin', and he's not been given much sense. You don't really need that money, you ain't sufferin' for it, and just give him time. Maybe the buggy-rides will cure the sick wife, and that may put new heart and more sense into the husband'; and so—betwixt an' between

—all I could do was pick them talkin'-posies an' fetch 'em to the wise little lad who's gone faring home to God. Now, come. You're to go back with me and make a good long visit. Sister Sarah's there, and if she isn't the best medicine the dear Lord ever sent to sick souls my name ain't Hiram Smith, Wood-sawyer to the Community of Millville. Come. This boulder's gettin' a trifle hard to set on, an' Sarah's got on her company bib-an'-tucker, all ready for you."

He rose from the big stone where they had been sitting while he talked and a wistful look came into Gail's eyes.

"I should like to go. Oh! how I should like it! The quiet, the peace of the big woods and the murmur of the river. It seems as if I could get rested there and, maybe, understand why this horrible thing has befallen me. But I can't without asking. I can't, more than ever now because—Oh Uncle Hi, I don't belong! I belong to nobody, nobody in all this world, since Jerry's gone! Did you know that? I didn't till just now, and I can't bear it!"

"Oh! yes you can," again he earnestly assured her. "Youth's a terrible season for

feeling things, but time helps. And it's all right at home. Some days ago I got permission to take an' fetch you to the mill soon's ever Sarah come. Some the neighbors up-hill will be goin' by to the post-office an' they'll bring back a satchel of clothes for you, so's you can stay a good long spell. We all reckon 't the woods will help you to get the rights of this great trouble and to settle your new life accordin'. Why, child alive, to lie under them pine branches and listen to 'em talkin' things over is the very soothingest of all created sounds. Come. I saw Sarah whiskin' a pan of the primest lookin' jumbles into my oven, an' my old mouth is fairly waterin' for a sample of 'em. Come."

The suggestion of his own hunger moved her sooner than an appeal to hers, and there was comfort in the thought of old Aunt Sarah's beautiful, cheerful face. She was a woman whose visits to her brother's isolated home had always been gala days for Jerome and Gail, that is when he had been strong enough to climb to the mill. Even now without him the girl grew impatient for the meeting and, once upon the road, needed no more

of Uncle Hiram's urging. Indeed, she soon outstripped him and, when the mill was in sight, ran forward alone to meet the welcome she knew was waiting. Ah! yes. There it was! The familiar thump, thump, thump, of a pair of wooden crutches over the hard path, and in another moment she was clasped in Aunt Sarah's arms.

"Why, bless my darling! How she has grown! A whole endurin' year since we two met, and now a'most as big as me! Bless her sweet face, 'tis a good sight to my old eyes. Come in, come in!"

For the sudden tears which came and filled her own eyes Gail could scarcely see the fine face bent to hers, but she snatched away the crutch nearest her and made the crippled woman use her own shoulder in its stead. Thus they entered the living room and there Uncle Hiram found them, side by side on the chintz-covered home-made lounge, with the girl's head on his sister's bosom, sobbing out all her grief. He was for remonstrance but the wiser woman held up her hand in protest and he left them to each other.

Aunt Sarah said not a word, nor did she



IN ANOTHER MOMENT SHE WAS IN HER ARMS

move, although the position into which she had half fallen strained upon her lame knee and gave her keen pain; and, finally, Gail ceased sobbing and lifted her tear-wet face with a feeble smile upon it.

“Oh, Aunt Sarah!”

“Yes, deary, I know. I know all about it. Seven little children and the good man who would have been the staff of my old age I’ve had to part with. Can’t tell me anything new about sorrow, though the worst is—each person’s grief is his own, especial, different from that of anybody else as he or she is different. But after all’s said and done I feel more grateful for the sorrow than for the joys of my life. True.”

“Why, Aunt Sarah! How can you? How can you? Grateful? Do you suppose I can ever be grateful for losing Jerry?” cried Gail indignantly, and feeling that the other must be actually heartless.

“Well, if you had lost him—no. If you had!”

“Haven’t I? Oh! I am sorry I came! I thought you’d understand, but you don’t. Nobody does. Nobody!”

Just then the sawyer's old cat, hitherto a favorite of Gail's, came purring to her feet and rubbed its sleek sides against her knee, asking to be petted. Instead of the expected stroking the girl gave the animal a fierce thrust, kicking it rudely out of the way, and crying:

"Oh! I hate it! I hate every such wretched, miserable creature! I've read that 'the principle of life' is all the same in everything. That has life—that good-for-nothing beast—yet Jerry—Jerry hasn't! I could rend every animal in bits with my own hands if so I might steal that 'life' which would bring him back to me! Oh, Aunt Sarah, why can't I die, too, and go to him wherever he is?"

"Because he's right here this minute; shocked as I am at the almost blasphemy your young lips speak. Don't say such as that again, little girl, if you don't want to grieve him."

It was Gail's turn to be astonished, and she harshly demanded:

"Are you a spiritualist, Aunt Sarah, and believe such things?"

"I never bothered my poor head with 'ists' nor 'isms.' I'm a plain, old-fashioned, try-

to-be-Christian woman. But I know that what has once been a part of my life is always a part. Do you suppose that just because my babies are asleep in the ground they're any less my babies than if they were sleeping in my arms? Not one bit. And the love that came with them, the love they left with me, has made me so much richer than I was before they ever lived. So with you. Jerome is here, inside your heart, your soul, a part of you. The best part, maybe, and that's for time to prove. Having had him you can never, never lose him. That's what I mean by his being here. And he's left you his work to finish. I think I never knew anybody more thoughtful for other people nor who tried so unselfishly to make other people happy. Well, always seemed as if you two were one; so it's plain as A B C that you've to go on spreading the happiness—and spreading it in double portion. There, that's the end of my sermon; and—for goodness' sake, Hiram P. Smith, do come in and stop peeking! Anything nettles me it's peeking! The lecture's over and the jumbles are done. Come in and help yourself; then fly around and set the

house to one side, 'cause I'm set on going posy-hunting soon's supper is over. I'll bake a batch of soda biscuit but 'll fix for yeast bread to-night. I brought a jar of my strained honey and a boiled ham from home. We'll feast royal! You see, Gaily, it always takes me two three days to get Hiram cooked up full. He's that silly over my things he pretends he could eat them constant, any hour I'll set 'em before him. Brother, hand me my chair, please. I can't bother with crutches when I'm in a hurry."

The sawyer obediently brought a slat-bottomed chair and held it while his sister placed her knee upon it and strapped it securely. Then she started across the room as briskly as if the chair were a human foot, though a noisy one; and remarking:

"I do wish, Hiram Smith, that you'd put some leather tips on the legs of this chair. It's just the right height and good and strong, but noisy! I can't hear myself think! Now I'll stir up the biscuit and you stir up the fire and—Gaily put the kettle on, Gaily put the kettle on, and we'll all drink tea!"

Off she went, thumpety-thump, to the tiny

lean-to behind the living-room ; and presently her voice came back to them, humming the doggerel, or catch word :

“ ‘ Betsey Benson built a fire to bake a batch o’ biscuit—bake a batch o’ biscuit—batch-a-baker-biscuit — batch-a-bitch-a-bake-a-bitch-kuit!’ Give it up! Such a twist to my tongue!” she laughed, like a child at play.

Then that other old child, her brother, took up the theme with the legend of “ Theophilus Thistle the successful thistle sifter,” but broke down more ignominiously than Aunt Sarah had done, and handed it on to Gail, who, before she realized it was retorting about the “ Sally she sells sea-shells,” and in a moment all were laughing. It was the veriest nonsense, of course, but it had answered its purpose ; it had roused the girl from that constant dwelling upon her grief which was so bad for her. Now she was shocked to think that she could laugh, and though she wept no more, she grew grave and thoughtful as she moved about, helping the sawyer to “ set the house to one side,” or, in other words, get the table ready for supper.

Then, while they sat down to wait the baking of the biscuit, she asked :

“ Uncle Hiram, will you think I’m too curious if I ask what made Aunt Sarah lame ? ”

“ Bless your heart, honey, didn’t you never know ? Why, how strange that is. I thought everybody did that knows us. Wait, let her tell. Here she comes. Sarah, Gail doesn’t know what set you to hopping around the world with a chair strapped to your knee. Wonderful, how she does hop, too. Up-stairs and down cellar, ‘around the house, around the house, and into my lady’s chamber.’ Fact. There ain’t a spot big enough to let a chair into that she don’t put it, housekeepin’. Tell, sister, how’t happened.”

Mrs. Tibbetts slipped the strap around on her chair, made a deft movement, and seated herself upon it.

“ There, ma’am ! It’s one of my blessings that wherever I go I always have something to sit on ! Well, I’m beat that you never knew. And I suppose it all came of what my rough-spoken brother here calls cantankerousness. That’s a long word and it’s dragged a long tail behind it. It happened, or it was

allowed, just after I was left all alone in my farmhouse. I'd come home from the last funeral that went out from it and I was desperate. I didn't care if I lived or died; and I sat down in my husband's empty chair and —— Well, the wicked, rebellious thoughts went through my brain won't bear repeating. Just then, out barn way, rose the biggest kind of a racket, the hired man hallooing, dogs barking, horses neighing—you'd thought the world was coming to an end. I was feeling as if it had come to an end, truly, for me and my happiness and, at first, I didn't budge. Then I heard one particular kind of a neigh that I knew was given by Nimrod, the colt my husband was breaking just before he was killed."

"Killed, Aunt Sarah? was—he—killed?" asked Gail, awe-struck.

"Sure. He'd been getting in hay and the loft was full. So he opened the door in it and braced it back with a heavy rail. There was a terrible wind blowing, the rail slipped and struck him and—that was all."

"How horrible!"

"Some think so. I did once. I know bet-

ter now. He was taken home without ever growing old or feeble or any suffering. And he was prepared. If ever a woman had a good example set her it was I with my husband. 'Twasn't his fault I had the temper of a wildcat. But—how I got this crooker, here! That's what I set out to tell. So, when I heard Nimrod squeal I knew he was being maltreated and that made me mad. I couldn't stand that anything he'd ever loved should be hurt, so I ran out to the barn and, after all, it was the colt's own fault. He'd been so used to husband's feeding he resented being fed by another; and when, as was right, the hired man hitched him up to the light sulky to drive a bit, lest he forget all he'd been learned, why the silly creature began to act as mean as he could—kick, bite, rear, whirl round and round in the sulky so fast one wheel couldn't touch ground, and cut up generally. It came through me that he was the very colt-picture of the way I was feeling in my own heart and I made up my mind I'd fix him! So, despite the hired man's opposing me, I managed to get into that sulky, somehow, and the reins into my hands. I

was a good deal more supple them days than now and not nigh so hefty, but I'd been used to dairy work and I had a pair of strong wrists. So I just headed Nimrod for the gate and says I: 'Now, you young scamp, if it's exercise you need it's plenty of it you'll get. Up and down Schunnemunk Mountain you go till you're tired and find out there's somebody boss, even yet. Your master reckoned you'd fetch a thousand dollars, once you was raised, and he needed just that to pay off the farm mortgage. So, sir, you've got to pay it! You shan't spoil his plans just because you're mean tempered. Now, go!'

"Well, Gaily, go he did! I don't know how many times I drove him right up that steep mountain, whirled around and down again, up and down, till he got so tired he could hardly breathe. Then I started home and crossing the bridge over the stream that ran before my own dooryard Nimrod took his revenge. Reared all of a sudden, like he'd been stung, flirled the sulky as if it had been a feather, and pitched me over the bridge-rail into the water. Broke both my legs, that fall did, and one healed straight and the other

crooked ; and that's all. Except that I had lots of time to do a deal of thinking while I was strapped to a bed waiting for those broken bones to set, and I hope, I hope, I've been a different woman ever since. I know I've tried to be."

"What became of that wicked colt?"

Aunt Sarah laughed in a way that was good to hear. Then answered,

"Maybe you'll think I'm notional when I say he was so shocked by what he'd done that he behaved like a gentleman all the rest of his days. True ; though the hired man claimed it was the terrible driving I'd given him took the nonsense out of him. No matter. No two people see from the same point of view. He was a splendid horse, and when he was a few years older he was sold and paid off the mortgage just as husband thought he would. A race-track man bought him and made lots of money on him. Hiram P. Smith, here, done that business for me ; and —— Whew ! I smell the biscuit ! I'm afraid they're burned as black as my shoe. Moreover, brother Hiram, there's a queer old man peek-

ing in through that shed as if he wanted something."

He did. He was Tommy's "ogre" and what he wanted was a girl.

CHAPTER XIV

LESSON LEARNING

GAIL stayed two whole weeks at the sawmill. None from home came to see her, but she met more people than in all her life before. Not a day but there were visitors, for a few minutes or a few hours, as the case might be, and, at first, she shrank from these strangers and fled to the woods on the hillside. Later, she began to realize that they were not really strangers, but her own townspeople, whom she had frequently seen upon the streets but had classed under a general head as "outside folks."

"Now, Aunt Sarah, I find they're inside folks, instead. It's odd how well they all seem to know me, but I suppose that's because fa—Uncle Philibert has been the schoolmaster. And—and they're so sort of human, too! They think things and talk things just as, well, as we do at home. Some of them talk almost cleverly, almost like the Dominie or Mr. Barlow."

“ Good. Very, very good. I have hopes of a person who realizes that all the smartness of this world isn’t shut up in his or her own body. It’s human nature, as you call it, to be a bit conceity ; to feel sort of know-it-all ; but it’s higher developed human nature to regard one’s neighbors in the world as being just a little wiser than one’s self.”

Gail opened her eyes in amaze. She was often being amazed by the words which fell from the lips of this old farm-wife, who had had but scanty education—by way of books—yet who had grown so wise, so gentle, and so generously charitable in her judgments. And at last she asked :

“ How did you learn all this, dear Aunt Sarah ? ”

“ The ‘ all ’ is pitifully little, deary ; but how I learned that little is plain as A B C. I’ve had sixty years’ time ; and I’ve kept my heart and eyes open, my hand ready to whatever task, and my lips shut. Keeping a body’s lips shut and letting other folks do the talkin’, is a sight easier way of learning than studying a spelling book. Why, child alive, there isn’t even a half-witted creature but can

teach me something; and the amount other, smarter ones can teach —— My! it's simply overpowering. The trouble is, life's too short to get much further than the alphabet in the book of wisdom, but even that's something. Now, who of all the folks came here to-day, to get a lift out of their worriments, struck you most?"

"The fretty wife of that silly man who bought the 'bugger-wagon' with Uncle Hiram's money. She seemed to need something to brace her up. Then if she were braced I fancied she could brace her husband, and between them she'd grow to be something more than a fussy invalid. I liked her, despite all, and she was mighty pretty."

Aunt Sarah threw back her own handsome head and laughed heartily.

"Content yourself, honey, but she's going to get her 'brace.' I've invited her out to the farm to stay a spell. She'll be a different woman when she leaves it."

"You've invited her, a stranger, and you so lame? Company means extra work ——"

"Oh! she'll have to do that herself. I'm going to give my hired girl a vacation, soon's

I get home. My visitor will have to help, a fair share, or she'll go hungry. She's had too much cossetting, and she needs contradicting. She'll get it. When I don't wait on her, hand and foot, she'll realize what a bond-slave she's made of her husband. Then she'll learn what 'tis to lose a husband, and—I calculate entertaining her will be about the hardest job I'll have to tackle this summer and the most charitable. I may even have to break my chair or lose a crutch to accomplish her making-over—though that's so much like deceiving I'll leave it till the last resort. And, I'm not denying I rather dread her visit," and Mrs. Tibbetts sighed softly, foreseeing the "upsetting" of her own peaceful home.

"Then, dear Aunt Sarah, don't have her. Tell her you've changed your mind."

"Trouble is, deary, my mind isn't the changeable kind—like the waist that woman had on; and once it's pointed out a way for me to help some other body walk a little straighter 'long the road of life, I have to follow that way whether or no. A changeable mind is mighty handy to have—for them as know how to manage one. But I don't. The

woman's invited. The woman will come ; and I shall do the best I can, according to my lights. Now, enough of her. Don't let's waste any more of our precious last day together on her. Let's go out into the woods and visit with the trees. Hiram P. Smith's lot in life is a pleasant one. 'Tisn't everybody can have both trees and river to talk with night and day. But he deserves it. He's a good man and his advice is worth following."

Gail winced. Her friend intended that she should ; for the girl had decided to enter a mill as a worker, to earn the money to pay board to some one, and to show everybody concerned that she knew she belonged to nobody and could live independently, if she tried. The old man whom Mrs. Tibbetts had espied "peeking," on the first night of this visit, had been her great-uncle Joram. He had come to offer her a home at "Big House," as soon as he was settled there ; but she was not then free from the influence of her adopted father ; and believing, as he did, that the old man had injured her own unknown father, had indignantly declined this offer. Whereupon Mr. Joram Graham had departed in high dudg-

eon and been seen no more. He was, evidently, a person accustomed to having his favors accepted at once and not apt to renew them when rejected.

Gail could not readily forgive the schoolmaster for what she considered his great deception; nor, indeed, could she conquer her love for him any more easily. Absence from the household at Roseland had told her how dear beyond words was each and every member of it, and how she missed them. Nor could she forget their constant devotion to her beloved Jerry. All her love pulled her homeward as her pride pushed her from it, and the nearest she and Uncle Hiram had ever come to quarreling had been concerning this very matter.

“Well, I declare! I’m cruel disappi’nted in you, Abigail Graham! The idee! Just because when you was a baby in arms, the man that took you to raise like his own child, didn’t choose to blat it out to the whole world that you wasn’t hisn, you must cut and run soon’s you get old enough to be a mite of use. Huh!”

“But, Uncle Hiram, you don’t understand.

Nobody does. Nobody could but Jerry and—he's gone, he's gone!"

When she broke into those paroxysms of grief her loving old friend could say no more; but now it had come to the last day of her visit and he had urged his sister to use both her influence and his in making Gail see things aright for herself. As a last resort, she was to be reminded that she had no right over herself, save such as the law allowed. Her uncle was her guardian and could prevent her "wild scheme" if he chose. But what her faithful hosts desired, was that she could see the right for herself and do it.

Out in the woods, Aunt Sarah dropped her crutches and herself beside the little spring which was so famous in all the countryside. The rocky basin where it bubbled emptied itself in one small stream; but she began to scrape away the soil that bordered this stream, and to make other channels for the overflow. Gradually, not only the near-by ground was watered but the moisture spread far and wide; till leaves and ferns which had drooped in the heat of the day, were refreshed and straightened visibly. After a little time of silence

the woman looked into the girl's face and smiled.

"Why did you do that, Aunt Sarah? Wasn't the one overflow sufficient?"

"Let's call it an allegory," she answered, turning her observant gaze upon the reviving ferns.

"Of what is it an allegory? I used to love them best of all my Sunday-school books."

"Well, call it that of 'The Happiness Spreader.' The spring is the source, the one little outflowing stream was what you call 'sufficient.' Sufficient for itself. It made quite a hullabaloo and racket, chattered so loud it fairly shut out all other sounds but its own. Was so satisfied that it didn't notice the half-dying things about it nor cared at all for their suffering. Then I came with my stick of correction and made a lot of trouble for it. It rebelled at first, did you see? Bubbled and fussed and wasn't at all obedient to my will. But when it found my will was stronger than its selfishness it gave up and flowed where I ordered. Don't you suppose that if this little stream could speak it would thank me for teaching it a broader, kinder way? Can't you

fit it to your own altered life? Can't you become a 'happiness spreader,' as Jerry wishes?"

"O Aunt Sarah! how did you know that? That it was right here on this very spot, almost, he said that very same thing to me?"

"Deary, I did not know, but I can easily believe he did. That would be like the brave, bonny lad I knew."

Gail was weeping softly, now, remembering the picture of her frail, handsome twin, and almost hearing his dear voice repeating the words he had spoken that unforgotten day they had spent in these woods.

"Making people happy is the best thing to wish for." "Living beautifully is better than making beautiful statues." "To make everybody happy is, also, to make everybody good." "You must make others happy—for us both—you who have the time and strength."

"Happy! How can heart-broken I make anybody glad? Oh, Aunt Sarah, how can I? I want to do everything Jerry liked or wished——"

"Say wishes, not wished, darling. His in-

fluence must hold you still although his weak, earthly heart has ceased to beat."

"But how can I? Show me the way. I'm not wise as he was, nor as you, nor—nor anybody else. I'm just a lonely, desolate, orphan girl!"

"You wanted all the water from the spring of Jerry's love to flow through your heart alone. He wants it spread wide, to enrich other hearts, and you can please him only by breaking away the hindering soil of selfishness and letting that love filter through the needy lives around you. You can do it, I know. Else you are not my own and Jerry's Gail!"

There was a ring of confidence in the other's voice that gave some courage to the girl's soul, and sitting there with head bowed on her knees, she began to see the circumstances of her life as she had not done before; and to realize that everything worth while had not come utterly to an end, as she had believed. Jerry had left her something to do. She was to take up Jerry's work and carry it on—for him! There was a world of comfort in the

very thought, and what would there not be in the deed—if she were strong enough, as he had fancied, to carry it out!

Suddenly she lifted her head and gazed outward through the forest, as if wrapt in visions of the future, a future made glad for many people because of Jerry—through her! And seeing this altered, glorified expression on the dear young face she loved so well, Aunt Sarah clambered to her crutches and stole away. She made noise enough, so doing, to frighten away an adventurous squirrel, for in her lameness it was impossible to move with absolute quiet, but Gail did not hear. For a long time she sat on, alone, thinking, thinking, and with her heart growing braver if not happier with each succeeding moment, and no one came to interrupt.

When Aunt Sarah stumped into the open shed of the sawmill she found the sawyer sitting dejectedly on a pile of logs, busily whittling a stick. Whittling, and especially whittling with that energy, was significant, and his wise sister promptly interpreted it.

“Now, Hiram P., you needn’t be so savage mad at that poor little basswood splinter, and

try to make it bear the blame of things not going to suit you. Because they are going to suit. I've left Gaily Graham out under the trees with a 'bee in her bonnet.' Other words, with an idea in her head that'll buzz around and make things lively for her till she falls to and sets that idea a-makin' honey. Her head's a good sized one, reckoning by sense-measurement, and that bee-idea is Jerry's own. That's the charm of it. 'For Jerry!' There ought to be product of a good bit of happiness-honey to spread on some dry, crusty lives. She's on the right road, at last, and 'twas our Jerry led her there. When she comes in, as she will by and by, take no notice of anything. Just get up now and start a brisk fire. It's early for supper, but I set the time for my limpsy visitor that is to go home with me, and I'd like to give our precious girl a good square meal first. Then I'll borrow the 'bugger-wagon' and drive her to Roseland myself."

"Roseland? Has she made up her mind to go back there, or have you made it up for her? Last I heard tell she was bound, hot foot, for Parson Barlow's, to stay 'till she

could get a place in a mill.' The disapp'intin' creatur' !”

“ I said Roseland. I didn't say the parsonage, and I did say no questions asked nor comments made. What I want made is a fire. A boy came along this morning, whilst you and she were out, and fetched a quart of strawberries. Said they was raised under glass, to his folkses'. His pa is the gardener to 'Big House,' and he was taking them to town to sell. I bought 'em, and if you ever could get off that log—shortcake !”

She merrily shouted the magic word at him, with a gesture of “shooing” chickens, and as if he were a startled fowl he flapped his arms, crowed, and sped to the wood-pile ; then Aunt Sarah hastened into the kitchen and soon there issued thence the savory odor of her brother's favorite dish. She trusted that when Gail returned she would fail to observe the novelty of strawberry shortcake thus early in the season, or to question whence it came. She was also resolved to announce the fact, should it be demanded ; for if one good thing could come from “Big House,” why not another ? And it had vexed her kindly, thrifty

soul that the family at Roseland should be at odds with the lonely old man who might have well befriended them.

However, Gail asked no questions. She strolled into the mill kitchen like one scarcely conscious of things about her, so deeply absorbed was she in her own thoughts. Pleasant, helpful thoughts, evidently; for she had not looked so happy, so like the old familiar favorite, since her sorrow fell; and she entered into the merry spirit of the hour that followed in a way to cause Uncle Hiram to toss both knife and basswood splinter into the waste basket.

“Oh! I like this sort of a picnic meal! it's too early for supper and too late for dinner. Just a delightful, delicious betwixt-and-between—better than either! Are you really going to drive me home in the famous ‘bugger-wagon,’ Aunt Sarah? How lovely!”

The sawyer winked at his sister when the word “home” fell from the girl's lips, but she frowned and shook her head; whereat he became so grave that Gail, looking up, observed and inquired:

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“What makes you so unhappy, Uncle Hi? Have I done anything I shouldn’t?”

“Not a thing. Not a thing! But can you blame an old feller for feelin’ nigh heart-busted when he’s goin’ to lose the best cook as well as his best adopted, out of his house to one click? What you think this kitchen’ll look like to me, with you two gone out of it? More’n that. Here have I been loafin’ round, doing nigh-hand to nothin’ for two mortal weeks, and now—I’ve got a job—a big one—and must go to work. There’s to be a power of fixin’-up done to ‘Big House,’ though it’s in fine order a’ready seems if, and I’ve got the lumber contract. And who do you think got it for me? Guess.”

Gail had frowned at the mention of “Big House,” but had done so half consciously; now she cleared her brow and tried to show a real interest. After all, even if great-uncle Joram’s presence in Millville was hateful to her, it needn’t be so to other people.

“I can’t,” said Aunt Sarah.

“Nor I; unless it might be the minister,” added Gail.

“Nary one nor t’other. Last creatur’ you’d

ever suspicion. It was our little Tommy!" Then, as if he had said more than he intended, he suddenly paused, nor would he add another word of explanation, though he had aroused the curiosity of his hearers to the utmost.

CHAPTER XV

HOME-COMING—HOME-LEAVING

THOUGH none had gone from Roseland to the sawmill during the fortnight of Gail's visit there, her family had not been without almost daily knowledge of her. The sawyer made frequent stops at his friends' door leaving the latest news—not always pleasant to the Dominie and his wife. Her indignation at her "deception" was not softened by Uncle Hiram's recital, for he really feared she would do some foolish, desperate thing which would involve them all in fresh and useless sorrow. Trouble was already heavy on the Roseland household and it angered him to think she would wilfully add to it by asserting her girlish "independence." On the other hand he was vexed by Mr. Graham, whose secrecy in the matter of Gail's and Jerry's parentage, he privately considered as great a "deception" as she did, even though he would not have admitted this to her. He had prepared them

to find her rebellious and difficult when they met, and it was therefore a great surprise, as the buggy whirled up to the door, to see her spring lightly from it and rush toward the house, with arms extended and beaming face, crying :

“Father! mother! Tommy darling—Lu! Oh! how glad I am to see you all! How sweet to be at home!”

The schoolmaster felt his heart lightened of half its burdens as his arms closed about her slender waist and he found her dark curls once more brushing his cheek. Nor was the house-mistress less gratified by the unlooked for brightness with which she was seized, hugged, and greeted :

“Dear little motherkin! You’re as ‘pretty as a picture’ to my homesick eyes. Have you missed me any? I’ve had a dear visit and—and I hope it’s done me good. Inside good, you know.”

Then, as the elders went outside to speak with Mrs. Tibbetts, Gail drew Luella and Tommy to her with an ecstatic little hug for each, and the demand :

“Now begin, you dears, and tell me every-

thing. Every single thing that's happened since I went away. Is the menagerie all right? Where got you that lovely hair ribbon, mistress Lu? And Tom, how's the treasury?"

"Don't squeeze me so tight, Gail. You muss my apron and it's just fresh. I earned that ribbon—think of that! I tatted a collar for Mrs. Sampson and she paid me twenty-five cents for it. Now, miss! Will you laugh at my trimming after this?" demanded Luella, releasing herself from the too demonstrative embrace.

"No, deary, I shall not. I feel as if I could never, never again laugh at you, or anybody. But I hope we'll laugh together—forever and a day! Are you glad to have me back, little girl?"

"Yes. I shan't have to sleep alone. I didn't like it much. I was afraid. So afraid sometimes that mother put Tom's cot in our room but he was no good. Why, that boy he goes to sleep the minute he's in bed, and even before! One night he went to sleep saying his prayers. Wasn't that awful?"

"Pretty bad!" returned Gail, drawing

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closer to her the little lad who represented all of brotherhood she was henceforth ever to know ; and who clung to her with unrestrained joy at her return. At Luella's reproof he had hung his sunny head, but only for a moment ; then he lifted his face and flashed upon her one of his bewitching smiles that rendered his rather soiled countenance perfectly cherubic in her eyes.

Luella's withdrawal had hurt—just a trifle. She had almost forgotten the little girl's practical and selfish nature, and had resolved to still regard as sister the child who was but a cousin. All battles with her own self had not been fought, up there on the hillside, and she had to fight a brief one now before she remarked :

“ You certainly are a clever-fingered creature, Lady Lu ! I wish I were half as deft with a needle or crochet hook, and I'm glad I'm back to protect you of a night. Though of what should you possibly be afraid ? ”

“ I—I don't—know ; only Mattie, Mattie Barlow said she wouldn't like to sleep in a house where'd been a—funeral.”

“ O Lu ! Don't, don't ! As if Jerry, our

loving, tender Jerry, could ever frighten anybody ! Oh ! that is dreadful ! ”

Despite her will the tears came rushing to poor Gail's eyes and blinded by them she let Tom lead her swiftly out of the house and into the beloved greenhouse. There she broke down completely, forgetful of unspoken farewells to Aunt Sarah, forgetful of everything save her own bitter loss.

It was wholly natural that familiar scenes should have brought it freshly back, even without Luella's thoughtless words ; and the grown folk who had witnessed her headlong rush across the lawn both understood and respected her emotion. Even Tommy comprehended and scowled fiercely upon his sister as he guided Gail's footsteps to the familiar hammock and gently pushed her into it. Then he sat down beside her and held her tight, tight, with his strong little arms till the shuddering sobs which shook her grew less frequent and at length ceased altogether.

When she looked down upon him and wanly smiled, he responded loyally :

“ Don't you mind the Trimmer. She don't mean to be mean. I'll take care of you good.

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Just like I did all the menag'. I didn't let nothing starve, not a thing. I only—only—wull, the white mice hadn't no sense, less they wouldn't have got sick just 'cause—but they're all right now. I didn't forget but once. I shan't never again. But it's awful lonesome here without you an'—without you, I mean. That's why I run away."

"You ran away, Tommy? Why? Where? When?"

"To—to the whenny man's. To big-uncle Joram's to the tavern where he lives. He—he—wull ——"

Tommy paused. Evidently he found it difficult to explain matters, even to this loving sister. She had such clear brown eyes! the kind "that looks right through a feller and sees to the bottom of him," as he had once stated to his beloved Jimmy Barlow. And, at that, the memories at "the bottom" of Thomas Jefferson Graham were not comforting.

Then, in another moment, the brown eyes looked away and around at the familiar things and the sisterly arm drew the little chap still closer, while to him it seemed as

if Jerry, also, were present smilingly demanding :

“ The truth, small laddie ! ‘ The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,’ master Tom ! ”

Jerry’s will had been paramount and he had always answered its demands with perfect sincerity. The good thing about Jerry was—had been—that he always understood a “ feller.” That’s ’cause he was a boy himself. But a girl ——

The brown eyes came back to gaze into that hidden soul of his, but now so gently, so lovingly, that instantly all fear vanished, and out rushed the whole matter, “ body and bones.”

“ Wull, Gail, father he said I mustn’t never, never have no more to say to big-uncle Joram, ’cept just ‘ good mornin’,’ or ‘ good day.’ He didn’t want no intrycourse ’twixt him an’ us, father didn’t. ‘ Not for the present,’ he said. I never seen no present, I hadn’t, only that ten cents I was give and I don’t believe father meant that. Wull, sir, one day I got so lonesome seems if I’d bust ; so I got my fishin’-tackle an’ went down to

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Pompses' Eddy, all by myself, 'cause Jimmy he'd been bad an' sassed his aunt and wasn't let to go; and I hadn't been fishin' long 'fore I heard somebody say: 'Kerchew!' just like that. All of a sudden he sneezed so't I nigh fell off the log into the eddy. An' I looked up sort of mad 'bout bein' scared, and there 'twas nobody but the whenny man. An' then he laughed an' said: 'Scared you, son, did I? Thought you had this corner of the world all to yourself, didn't you?' So then I laughed, too, and said yes. He's a real nice man—when he keeps his hat on. An' then he asked if I'd had any luck and course I had to tell I hadn't. I couldn't say just 'good morning' to a question like that, could I?"

"Hardly. But go on."

"There wasn't much go on. When two fishers get together they can't help talkin', can they? He hadn't had no luck neither. Our lucks hadn't begun yet, but they did right soon an' I fetched a mess of fish home an' mother she cooked 'em for dinner. That was the first fresh meat we'd had for two three days, an' sir they was the best fish you ever tasted!"

"I believe it, dear. But haven't—haven't you had the usual things to eat since I've been gone?" asked Gail, perplexed.

"We haven't had too much, I guess. Mother says we're econermizin' an' seems if that means goin' hungry most the time."

"Well, dear, we'll talk of that later. I want to hear all about your running away and how much you have seen of our great-uncle Joram. Tell me everything and you'll feel better—inside."

"Gail, how'd you guess I didn't feel nice in my insides?" asked Tommy, surprised.

"I judged you by myself. If I'd run away and—— Maybe, I've done worse! No matter, I know, I 'sym,'" she finished with a laugh, this having been the little boy's expression when he had first begun to talk and had hurt himself in some tumble. "I sympathize," had been his parents' assurance then, abbreviated into "sym" by his baby lips.

"Wull, I stayed there ever so long. Then I went to the tavern with him and he talked to me a lot. Say, Gail, I believe, I for truly do believe that funny old man is 'most as lonesome as me an' you is 'bout our Jerry. He talked

like if he'd lived he'd have paid money, lots of money, to give him a 'chance.' I mean Jerry the chance. He asked so many questions I couldn't hardly keep track nor answer more'n half. He coaxed me to go away up to 'Big House' with him, where he's goin' to live, and he didn't know—I didn't know—I hadn't been forbid. Gail, father never'd said a word about goin' walkin' with that man. Is walking uphill to 'Big House' the same as havin' intrycourse?"

"O Tommy, I fear it is! But tell me all. Uncle Hiram began to say that you—you!—had recommended him to furnish lumber for 'Big House.' How did that happen?"

"Why nohow; only, when we got up there an' was lookin' round like, big-Uncle Joram he said as how 'honest men was few,' but 'if he could find a honest man that had good wood planks to sell he'd buy some an' have a new barn built.' He's goin' to have a lot of cows an' things that'll cost lots. He used to be a little farmer boy, once, just think! And now he's goin' to be a 'fancy farmer old boy' again. An' then he said the house was pretty big, but he guessed he could stan' it. He'd

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‘lived alone for a good many years an’ he thinks he can stick it out to the end.’ He said so. But——”

“But, Tommy, seems to me you must have seen great-uncle Joram more than once to get all this information.”

“Oh! I have. I’ve seen him lots of times.”

“Then there’s been more than one ‘running away’! O my dear!”

“Wull—wull——”

“Little brother, why haven’t you told father? Surely, you haven’t grown afraid of him just lately, when you’ve never been before. Don’t you know that you’ve done wrong?”

“Abigail Graham! ‘Course I know it. That’s what makes my insides go all squirmy like when father looks at me sometimes. But I couldn’t tell. How dare I? Why, once when mother she was feeling so dreadful poor an’ wonderin’ what would become of us all without father havin’ no school, and she said ‘if Uncle Joram would help us’—father he int’rupted same’s he’s told us wasn’t polite, and he said: ‘Mary! Please drop that subject for all time. Never speak of him again,

never !' Just like that he said it. So, if he'd scold mother and make her cry, like she did then, how'd a little boy as me dare to tell things? Huh! I guess you've forgot how father looks when he talks that way. Huh!"

They sat very still for a long time after that. Tommy was infinitely relieved by his confession, and really felt that he had shifted all his faults and disobedience to her shoulders. There had been something delightful in his secret "intrycourse" with the old gentleman who was so entirely "nice" when he "kept his hat on"; but there had, also, been a flavor to this delight which had been a little unpleasant. But now he felt better. He felt so much better that when he asked Gail if she should "tell," he hardly cared what punishment might follow; and, of course, if he had made her his scapegoat that punishment should be hers, not his. He was not prepared to have that "squirmy" feeling, of a guilty conscience, forced back upon him by her saying simply:

"Why, no, Tommy boy, I shan't 'tell.' I couldn't be a tattler. You will have to do your own telling. But now, let us take one

look around and then go in. Oh ! how empty the old greenhouse is without my boy ! ”

The heart of master Thomas Jefferson seemed to sink into his very copper-toes ! And his woe-begone face “ told ” for him that there were misdemeanors to be confessed to that father who now entered the greenhouse, just as they were leaving it. He cast one terrified, appealing glance toward his sister, who smiled encouragingly, and remarked :

“ Brace up, laddie ! It’s like having a tooth out—get it over, quick ! ”

Then she went away and Tommy looked into the questioning eyes of the schoolmaster and, presently, had made a clean breast of his “ secrets.” This time his relief was lasting and his punishment not too severe. Indeed, as the father drew his little son upon his knee and listened to his tale, he felt his own heart greatly disturbed, and inward doubts of his own judgment made him lenient toward the repentant child.

Meanwhile, Gail had entered the living-room and found her mother preparing the simple supper. The girl had resolved that there should be no change in her manner of

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addressing her guardians. Though at first she had indignantly called them uncle and aunt, dropping the dearer titles, better, wiser thoughts had prevailed. They were the only parents she had or ever could know and they had acted the parts most unselfishly and tenderly. The idea of "happiness spreading" was strong in her mind and with her old playful habit, she gently took the ladle from the housewife's hand, saying :

"Why, motherkin ! I'm home, you know ; and whoever wielded the pudding-stick when I was handy by ? Smells good, your mush ! But what do you suppose we had up at the mill this very day, and so early in the year ?"

"I couldn't guess, dear. Some of Mrs. Tibbetts's fine cooking, no doubt. Anybody can cook nice things, though, if they have the money to pay for them. As for us, we must be thankful for a quart of Indian meal, now and again !" There was bitterness in the weary woman's tone as there was fresh anxiety in her mind. She had been cautioned by her husband to keep a certain matter to herself, for a little while, but at sight of Gail's loving, sympathetic face, caution fled and out came

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the prohibited news, without softening or preface.

“ Abigail Graham, we have got to move. We must leave Roseland.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE SCIENCE OF DOING WITHOUT

“LEAVE Roseland ! Why?”

“Every ‘why.’ First, the place has been sold. The superintendent of the new mill, Uncle Joram’s mill, needed a house and bought this. We should never have had so fine a home but it was furnished the school-master by the board, which rented it cheap ; because when your father—uncle ——”

“Let him still be my ‘father’ and you my ‘mother,’ please, if you are willing,” said the girl, with a little catch in her voice, and wondering if there were nothing but sorrow and disappointment in life.

“Surely, Gail. It suits us if it does you. I’ve tried to do ——”

“You have, dear, you have ! No mother could be kinder than you have always been and I will try, too, to prove myself a helpful daughter. I used not to think about things—I just let them happen, any way. Now—I

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mean to be different. Go on, please, about Roseland."

"Only that when we came we were allowed to live here because there was no other place and it was cheap. Nobody else could be found to rent such a tumble-down affair, because nobody who wanted a mansion would cramp themselves into the servants' quarters, as we have done."

Mrs. Graham had sat down to rest, while Gail attended to the supper getting in her stead; but the mush being now finished and the table ready, the girl, also, dropped down on the floor beside the other's chair, and, with an effort, consolingly remarked:

"But, even so, we've been very happy here."

"Yes. Fairly happy. You've been too young to realize some things. Yet, even servants' quarters seem far better than none. And what is to become of us I do not know! Really, and truly, I cannot even guess. There isn't a cottage to be had, although we had money to pay for one. I've tramped the town over, looking, and not one could I find. This spring has brought so many new operatives to Millville that not only is Factory

Street overcrowded but the work people have come up into High Street and are living at the rate of two or three families in a tenement. Oh! Millville itself is prosperous enough! It's only we who are so desperately poor and homeless."

Poor Gail! It was going to be difficult to "spread" much "happiness" here! And as to leaving Roseland, with its every nook and corner so full of memories of Jerry—she dared not think about that just yet. But she had observed one thing in Aunt Sarah's conduct which helped her through that moment; she always did something when she was troubled.

"I never sit down to a worry, Gaily. I find it's better to get right straight up and thump around—doing something, no matter if I want to or not. Worries are like mould on cheeses; grow fastest when the cheeses aren't turned early and often," the farm-wife had declared.

"It's time for me to get up and turn my cheese!" she exclaimed, and bravely smiling into her mother's puzzled face. "In other words, the family mush is ready for the family and I'll connect the two, if possible." So out

she ran to the greenhouse, summoned the Dominie and Tom; then sought Luella—primping in her bedroom; coaxed Mrs. Graham to her place, but took her own stand behind the master's chair, ready to serve.

“ You see, I've had one picnic-dinner-supper this afternoon and it isn't ‘ econermy ’ to eat two on one day. Besides—those who eat the most mush can have the most cake and honey ! ”

“ What? What's that you say, Abigail Graham ? ” demanded Tom, dropping his spoon with a clatter and receiving Luella's instant reproof.

“ Fact ! I have both in my satchel. Dear Aunt Sarah brought an extra lot of her strained honey to the sawyer and he protested that it gave him the toothache ! If it did, it was the sort of toothache that was easily cured, for it never lasted beyond the meal when we had honey on the table. Then, this very morning, that splendid, thoughtful woman made a loaf of cake for me to bring home ‘ to the children, ’ and if father and mother aren't children enough to top off this mush supper with a piece of raisin cake—

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chock full, Tommy boy, chock full of them! —I'm disappointed in them. Now, swallow fast, laddie, while I unpack the goodies. Isn't it fine to have an Aunt Sarah in the 'connection'?"

"Yes, it's fine; but finer far to have our own dear daughter back, so brave and unselfish," answered the schoolmaster, with such earnestness that the tears rushed again to the girl's eyes, though this time they were tears of joy and gratitude. His few words covered a world of meaning. They told her that he had known all about her recent indignation and "independence," had forgiven it and recognized the return of a better spirit; and despite the ache in her heart, which seemed almost unbearable when she glanced toward Jerry's place, she was truly glad and thankful.

Also, after the dishwashing, that again fell naturally to her charge, she sought the Dominie in the study and perched herself on the arm of his chair, in the old fashion and begged:

"Now, pater, you tell. Mother said we must move. She explained why, but I'd like

to hear it over again from your dear lips. It will take more than one telling to make me realize leaving this home."

She resolutely refrained from looking toward the lounge where Jerry used to lie, and idly pulled nearer her the volume which the schoolmaster had been studying. Then she observed :

"Astronomy—the science that I was to begin upon this very next fall. Now, I guess I'll have to take up, instead, the Science of Doing Without!"

"Aye, deary, that's the science we must all achieve, I fear."

"Well, why—fear? It seems to me that—that since Jerry isn't to suffer by the changes—they needn't matter so much to us who are strong. Of course, I don't mean to seem heartless and careless about you and mother, but there surely will be some way out. We can't live in a tree, like the squirrels—but have you any plans?"

"None. I am sorry to admit it but I am as helpless as an owl in the sunlight. I cannot see ahead. We have just a little money left—a very, very little. We shall not actually

starve for a few weeks longer, thanks to your mother's forethought. However she has managed to save anything from our small income is beyond me to understand. She is more capable than I ——"

"O father, no!"

"It is simply just. I have known books and a schoolroom. I am not sufficiently practical to keep a ledger, even if I could secure a bookkeeper's position, and there is none vacant here unless it might be in Joram Graham's new mill. I could not ask that nor endure to take his wage. In any case,—I shall never have the chance, even if I desired. In all my life I have not felt so doubtful of myself, so helpless in the face of the future. God knows what is to become of us, I don't!"

"Yes, dear, He does know, He must. It isn't by chance that sorrowful things come—wise Aunt Sarah says. She knows. She said one other curious thing: that she was more grateful for the griefs than the joys of her life. Well, I didn't come to talk goody-good, even second-hand Mrs. Tibbetts-isms. To come back to our new science—I reckon the 'first lesson for beginners' is to get rid of the menagerie.

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No roof for ourselves means no roof for them."

"Ah, I suppose so! I confess the poor animals had not entered my thoughts. What will become of them?"

"I'm glad they didn't enter. Leave them to me. I'll find a home for every single pet. And, hark! Isn't that Luella calling? She told me she didn't like rooming alone; so—I guess I'm hindering more than helping, and good-night, father dear!"

Gail lay awake for a long time, pondering the coming changes in the family life and, in especial, making plans for the disposal of the beloved menagerie. She dreaded parting with any single creature of the "troupe," yet because of her greater loss in Jerry's death, she could be more patient concerning these lesser ones. In her mind she was just conveying the asthmatic canary back to Mrs. Mosher when ——

"Why, mother! Is it possible you are calling us to breakfast? I—I fancied I hadn't been asleep, at all!"

"Indeed you have. I've been up twice, but you both were so comfortable I hated to

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disturb you. Now I must, so hurry and dress. I have to begin packing up this very day. Word has just come that Roseland will be required by the end of the week ; yet I do think we might have had a longer notice. That's the way of the world, though ; when people are traveling down-hill others seem always ready to kick them further on."

Mrs. Graham's tone was querulous and this an unpleasant beginning to what would prove a trying day, and, for a moment, poor Gail's heart sank. Evidently, the grief which was still so fresh to her had become a thing of the past to others, and she was to be given no chance to indulge it ; and though this was quite in accordance with her own plans for "happiness spreading" she found herself resenting this state of things. Then better thoughts prevailed, and with an inward reflection upon what Jerry would have done under the same circumstances, she sprang lightly from the bed and responded :

"Well, don't forget, mother dear, that if you have all this hard work before you I am here to help ! Such a helper I will prove—wait and see ! Come, Lu ! We're all going

to begin a new study this morning, so 'step lively, please' !”

“Study, Gail Graham? What do you mean? I hate study. Besides, it's vacation for us, since father's been put out of the school. I shan't study anything, I tell you that.”

“Oh! yes you will. I'm sure of it. You'll be as much interested as anybody. Besides, it isn't quite the fact that father was 'put out'—yet. I prefer to think he put himself out, instead. Can I help you?”

Luella declined aid and Gail hurried below stairs, to find the Dominie had already breakfasted and was once more setting out house hunting. She did not suspect that finding a home was the more difficult for them because they no longer had any visible means of support, nor that owners of tenements, even cheap ones, must satisfy themselves that their rent will be forthcoming when due.

Tommy straggled in, unchided because of oversleeping, and the three sat down to their belated meal, while the house-mother departed above stairs to begin her disagreeable task of sorting and packing. The breakfast finished, Gail made short work of clearing up, then

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summoned Tom and Luella to the greenhouse.

"Now, youngsters, the firm is assembled and the firm must consult. I ——"

"What was that lesson you said we'd got to study? I asked mother and she didn't know; said she guessed it was some of your foolishness," remarked Luella, immediately seating herself on the best box and producing her tatting.

"Oh! but the dear woman was mistaken! Nobody has learned that lesson better than she. I call it 'The Science of Doing Without.' We have all thought we knew it, too, but we didn't. Now, it's to become a part of the day's work. Regular, no let up, no turn back, no sneaking. First and foremost: we have to 'Do Without' the menagerie. We've got to get rid of every single pet and—do it to-day! If that is possible. Now, let's divide the labor. Luella, which of the animals—how many—will you undertake to find homes for?"

"I? Not one. You needn't ask me. The idea!"

"Why won't you? Are you too lazy?"

asked Gail, her too ready anger flaming at the supercilious toss of the little girl's head.

"No, I'm not lazy. I'm a good deal more industrious and capable than you are. Mother says so. There now."

"Luella, did she?" demanded the elder girl, deeply hurt.

The yellow curls bent low over the bit of tatting and a flush dyed the round cheek beneath them. All the Grahams had been trained to habits of strictest truthfulness and Luella knew that her statement was but partially correct. After a moment's battle with herself, she amended it by saying:

"Well, about sewing and making trimming she did. But—but she said ——"

"I know, Luella Graham. I heard her," broke in Tommy, the loyal. "I heard her say you was awful handy to help with the clothes an' things but she'd never missed anybody like she missed our Gail. She said Gaily had been real sunshine till Jerry—you know! I couldn't tell what that was, 'bout any girl, just plain girl, bein' 'sunshine.' An' I asked her; an' she said—she said—wull, 'Gail don't never fuss 'bout so much mush

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an' so little cake,' an'—an'—lots of things, that way. An' father, he spoke in an' he said as how Gail has a 'noble nature' and would 'come out all right in the end.' I thought she was all right, without no 'comin' out,' 'cause I missed her, too, missed her terr'ble. An' I think so now, Luella Graham, and I'd like to study the new book first-rate. I would so."

It was such a novelty to hear Tommy desire to study anything, and there was so much love shining from his blue eyes, that Gail gave him a hug and felt her anger vanish.

"Well, laddie, I reckon it's a 'study' that's forced upon us rather than chosen, but we can rob it of half its hatefulness if we go at it, 'hammer and tongs,' as Uncle Hiram does the knotty lumber. What do you wish to dispose of, yourself? since Luella has left the job to us two."

"I don't wish none of 'em; but I'll make Jimmy Barlow take back the rabbits or—or I'll know the reason why he don't. He—he ain't so nice a boy as he was, Jimmy ain't. His aunt she went to Ne' York an' she fetched him home a autermobeel, an' just 'cause I

wanted to take the wheels off an' see its insides, just a teeny tiny bit, he—he got mad. 'You go right straight home, Tommy Graham, an' don't you dast to never touch one my autermobeels again,' he said. Just like that he said it, Jimmy—Jimmy Barlow!"

"O Tommy! Has that Damon-and-Pythias friendship suffered a rupture?" cried Gail, laughing. "What a pity! Jimmy would be a great help just now."

"Don't need no help. Let's have a nauction! They was a nauction up by the tavern, once; an' the baker man he was the nauctioneer. My stars! You'd ought to hearn him talk! Fast! You couldn't keep up thinkin' with what he said; but the folks they bought things like everything. Me an' father was comin' along an' we stopped to listen; an' father he said some of 'em was foolish, 'cause they was coaxed to buy things they didn't need. One woman she bought a horse, an' she told father 'twas just 'cause it was cheap, an' was old, an' had been a family pet. An' then he asked her did she have a wagon or a harness or a stable. An' she hadn't none. She'd got to buy them yet to go with the horse; an'

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when she said it she was kind of scared, an' father he told her better sell the horse back again, even if she was sorry for it. 'Twould be cheaper than all them other things and she did. An' my stars! She got a dollar, a whole dollar more'n she paid! An' she was so tickled she said she'd put that in the church plate the very next Sunday 't ever was an' she thanked father real polite like. But if we sold our anermals we wouldn't have to put money in the poor box, would we?"

"We couldn't afford to. If any of them brought money we should give it straight to father and mother."

"O pshaw! Why?"

"Because, my boy, that would be a lesson in 'Doing Without.' Oh! I don't say it's a pleasant study. You remember that, please. Now, I'm going to Mr. Sampson's. If I can get his bookkeeping again, I'll be glad, though I shan't want cat-dog-meat for pay any more. Ah! me! The poor creatures! What will become of them? Who will love them as we have? But—this won't do. Tommy, I think the auction idea isn't half bad. Only we'll have to ask father and

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mother about it first. We will, as soon as I come back, if he is at home then. Now, let's feed them all round and I'll go. Also, while I'm gone you keep on thinking—fitting animals to folks, so to speak ; remembering who liked what, etc. Good-bye, both. That's a pretty pattern you're doing, Lu ; but I guess you'd better take your work into the house again, in case mother wants one of us. You can tell her where I've gone, though she herself said that I ought to see the butcher. Good-bye."

Gail now wore without protest the simple black gown which Aunt George had provided. While she doubted if Jerry would have approved anybody's wearing "mourning" for him, she felt as if it were a tribute to his memory and suited her position as the nearest of kin. Besides, her clothes were the least of her troubles, and she had become used to their sombre color during her sojourn at the saw-mill. Aunt Sarah had unpacked them from the valise sent up to her from home, and had observed :

"The least a girl of your age can do is to obey her parents, and it seems to be their will

that you should wear these things. So I would."

But if she had grown accustomed to her changed attire, others, her town acquaintances, had not; and as she now entered the meat-shop, she was amazed to see Mrs. Sampson rush forward, hastily thrusting a handkerchief to her eyes, and to feel herself clasped in a vigorous hug, while the sympathetic woman exclaimed enigmatically :

"Oh! it breaks my heart to see you! Yet I'm tickled 'most to death! Now there isn't a single thing stands betwixt an' between!"

CHAPTER XVII

SURPRISING STATEMENTS

GAIL wondered if Mrs. Sampson had suddenly become bereft of reason, but she was to be further mystified :

“ Now, come right away in, to the settin'-room, an' let's talk it over. 'Tis just what I've always wanted an' him, too, an' 'twould be the nicest thing in the world for Delly. If I'd thought the world over I couldn't have picked out one would suit all round no better. You're a good age, over all your children's diseases—— You've had 'em, ain't you ? ”

“ What do you mean, please? I fear I'm very stupid, but I don't understand what you are talking about. I came to see Mr. Sampson. Of course he understood why I—I had to drop the bookkeeping for so long, but I'd like to take it up again, if he will employ me. Is he at home ? ”

“ No. He's off slaughterin'. It's his regu-

lar day for it ; but you don't need to see him. We're both of one mind. We've talked it over an' Delly, too. He's awful tickled at the notion, Delly is, bless his heart ! He hain't never had no sister, Delly hain't, but he'll treat you square. My ! That's real nice bombazine, or parametty, your dress is made of. I shouldn't want you to wear black a great while, an' your Aunt George, she wouldn't have to furnish no new ones. You'd look fine in red. Red would become your dark curls and brown eyes and your complexion, too. You'll look real nice together, Delly an' you, he bein' so light and you so brunetty like. 'D you say you'd ever had the measles, or scarlet fever, or the mumps ? ”

“ I didn't say ; but I believe I've had them all. I've had the whooping cough, too, if it would interest you to know,” answered Gail with some asperity.

“ 'Course it int'rests. Anything about you does. I always thought you was real healthy. I shouldn't have took the notion if you'd been the sickly one he —— ”

The girl hastily rose. Of all the people she knew, this chattering woman was the last per-

son with whom she could discuss Jerry. It was she, indeed, who had first suggested the calamity which had befallen, and she could bear no more.

But, at that instant, entered Adelbert, hanging shyly back near the door till, seeing her advance toward it, he misconstrued her action and hurried to meet her with extended hand.

“ Why, Gail, I’m real glad to see you. How nice you look in them clothes all of a color ! I always thought you was the prettiest girl in Millville and now I know it. ’Twasn’t nothing but them mixed-up rigs you used to wear that spoiled your looks. Well, you an’ ma been talkin’ it over ? When ’ll you come ? Your folks have got to leave in a few days, hain’t they ? Too bad ! Too bad for them, I mean, an’ ’most too good for us. Ma’s going to give you the front spare room. She says it’s none too nice, though she has got her best shams and things in it. I hope it’ll be this week, ’cause the Sunday-school picnic is next and I’d like to take you to it. I’ll take Luelly an’ Tommy, too, just as lief. Tommy’s smart. I don’t know another little tacker in the town as nice as he is. But Luelly, she’s

too airish to suit me. What you standing up for? Why don't you set down an' take off your hat? Ma, I do believe you didn't ask her?" remarked the youth, suddenly become so voluble that Gail could hardly believe he was really Adelbert Sampson.

"Well, son, maybe I didn't. She come so in the nick o' time, just as I was plannin' it all out, that I forgot my manners. Well, Gaily here has got real nice manners an' she'll teach 'em to us. I ——"

The visitor had to obey Adelbert's suggestion and sit down. She felt herself unable to stand and passed her hand across her eyes, the better to clear her sight. Then she asked with decision :

"Will you good people please tell me what in the world you are talking about? I do not understand, in the least."

Mrs. Sampson likewise sank into a chair and almost gasped. Then she looked at her son and exclaimed :

"Well, there, I don't suppose you do! We've talked it over an' figured it over so much an' so long—ever since it come out 'twas true, what folks had all along surmised,

how 't you an' Jerry wasn't the Dominie's own children —— ”

“ Do people know that? ” asked Gail eagerly.

“ Sure. Certain. You twins an' them others wasn't never no more alike than chalk an' cheese. That's why I cal'late there won't be no objections raised. None to speak of. You'll have a good home. One the comfortablest in Millville, even if 'tis joining the shop ; plenty to eat, good clothes to wear, and a brother to take t'other one's place.”

Poor Gail almost screamed. That lank, limp boy across the room to even imagine himself where her idolized twin had been ! It was intolerable that such an idea could have entered anybody's head, even one so silly as his. But she began to understand. These people were offering her a kindness. Of that she was now certain but in what form she was not so clear. Moreover, the very thought of Jerry, which Adelbert had roused, enabled her to speak with calmness, now, and even with exceeding gentleness as, laying her hand on the red, podgy one of her hostess, she remarked :

“ I do not understand quite what you would have me do. Is it to pay you a visit? ”

“ A visit? No, indeed. To come and live. Forever and always. We want to adopt a girl, me an’ him do, an’ we’ve settled on you. I’ve always liked you, though I never said much about it. Didn’t see you none too often, neither. But I’ve took notice. You’re the one that’s always give up. Luelly, she’s as pretty as peaches but she’s selfish an’ stingy. Anyway, she’d be out the question, ’cause her folks is alive. You’re an orphan, they say, so there wouldn’t be nobody to interfere, nor no other pa an’ ma to compare us with. We’re plain as a pipe-stem, he an’ me are, but we’ve got plenty to do with an’ it’s my ambition to be somebody ’fore I die. I cal’late you could teach me a lot and I wouldn’t be ashamed to learn of you, ’cause I like you. You could make a gentleman of Delly, too. So you’d feel as if you was payin’ your way, into the bargain. I should want you to show Delly, if you could, ’bout the account keepin’, an’ try to make him some use. He’s a good boy. I don’t see how there could be a better—but I—I don’t like to

have folks call him 'Sissy.' It mads his pa, dreadful."

Mrs. Sampson ceased speaking and fixed her eyes on the face of her son. If ever true affection spoke in any glance it did then in hers; and mingled with the love was a regret for her own former unwisdom in "spoiling" her one child.

A month earlier, Gail would have felt the humor, the almost absurdity of the situation, and have felt nothing else. To-day, underlying the humor was a pathos which touched her heart and made her wish to serve these kind, unlettered folk who had so generously desired to serve her. Of all the town, to think it was the woman whom she had once declared she "hated" that sought to take a mother's place toward her! There was a little catch in her voice and a mist in her brown eyes as she said, earnestly:

"Dear Mrs. Sampson, what you suggest is impossible, but it is not impossible that we should be the best of friends. Nobody else, nobody—has offered me such kindness. I don't deserve it, but I will try to prove you are not altogether mistaken in me. I'm not

half as good as you fancy. Indeed, I'm not good at all; the only thing about me that might be worth while is that I do love people, and I do want to make them happy. Now, you've been frank with me about your affairs and wishes and I'd like to talk mine over with you. My Jerry liked you, Adelbert; he said so on one of our last days together, and for his sake I'd like to have you help me plan a way out of some of our troubles. The menagerie, to begin with; because we must leave Roseland so soon. Tommy suggests an auction, and I don't know but that would be the best way to place the animals in new homes. Yet I don't believe it would be pleasant for my parents to have a lot of people come to Roseland, especially just now. Do you know anybody who wants any bird or beast, such as ours? Going, going, gone!"

Adelbert had flushed with pleasure at what Jerry had said about him and all the chivalry of his nature was roused to befriend this now brotherless girl, who was trying to face her sorrows so bravely. Nor was Mrs. Sampson behind him in his desire to help. She had by no means relinquished her plan of adopt-

ing Gail, just because of one emphatic "impossible." Indeed, the prompt, yet appreciative rejection of it had but increased her desires in the matter, but she was wise enough to say no more at present, and to realize that the subject should be brought to older judgments than "a mere slip of a girl's," before it was settled. She now looked up from the pattern of the florid carpet she had been studying and exclaimed :

"I've got the notion ! Gaily, you write out some two three papers, big pieces like foolscap, and state that there will be a sale of trained pets, on 'count of removal—same's other auction notices I've seen ; then if the Dominie'll say 'yes,' we'll put 'em in the shop window. The papers, not the animals, I mean ; though that cage of white mice Delly told of wouldn't be a bad idee to set right under the advertisement. Then, if all's suited, Delly could drive the butcher cart down to your circus an' fetch 'em all to once, an' we could have the 'vandoo' right here, on that vacant lot behind the shop. Delly could put up his Fourth-of-July tent for some the folks to set under ; 'cause if 'twas known

'round that 'twas the good Dominie's things was auctioned there'd a power of people come. That ought to fetch a consid'able sum for your folks; an', besides, some of them would likely step into the shop an' buy a few chops, or a slice o' ham, or somethin'. So you needn't feel at all obligated to us," she concluded, forestalling any protests on Gail's part.

However, there were no protests forthcoming; and with Adelbert as escort the girl at once hastened home to find out her parents' will in the matter. This time, it must be observed, she neither ran away from her companion nor flouted him, as on a former occasion. He seemed no longer silly, or desirous for a "pin-feather flirtation" such as had then disgusted her healthy mind, but just a real friend, as interested in her success as she would have been in his. Indeed, she was resolving, then and there, to "help" him; to show him how a lad could be manly without aping grown-up people, and to point out to him at least one way in which he could please his parents more. Thought she:

"If I go back there to keep books, I'll make him learn to keep them, too. Then when he

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has learned I'll —— Well, I reckon some other thing will happen by which I can help my home—wherever it may be—as he will be helping his.”

Fortunately, the schoolmaster had returned from his house hunting, though with no better results than heretofore. Maybe he was the more willing, therefore, to listen to the scheme Gail and Adelbert propounded, and to consent to it. An auction seemed to his conservative mind but little short of disgrace; but it would be a greater disgrace to permit helpless animals to become starving vagrants. As for Tommy, he was at the acme of delight. Was it not his brilliant brain which had originated this plan? And wasn't he the only young member of his family who had attended such a function? Huh! What that enthusiastic lad didn't know about “vandoos,” as such sales were locally termed, wasn't worth mentioning.

Also, the affair took place just three days later; nor is it necessary to tell of all the heart-broken scenes which preceded it. Even Luella found herself in tears, as one after another of the bewildered animals was placed in

the roomy cart ; and, with Balaam at its tail, all were driven off of the grounds and up the steep street out of sight. She retreated to her mother's half-dismantled room and, to make herself forget these painful partings, became extremely busy in deciphering a difficult, printed formula for a crocheted jacket.

Indeed, none of the Grahams were present at their auction, except master Tom, whose self-importance on the occasion caused many a smile. However, not smiles, nor even open laughter, bothered him at all. Adelbert was clerk of the affair and Tommy was his shadow during the brief hour. As predicted, many came ; some through real interest in their beloved Dominie, others to recover their former pets which had sojourned for a time at Rose-land, and still others because of the novelty of such a "vandoo." In any case, the auction proved a wonderful success, from a money point of view, although Mrs. Mosher stoutly protested against paying cash for her asthmatic canary, despite the fact that it was now a trained canary, as well. Strangely enough, most of the bidders were "John Doe" and "Richard Roe" ; names unfamiliar to the

Millvillians, and represented by an agent—none other than Uncle Hiram P. Smith.

To Hiram P. Smith, acting thus for the unknown Doe and Roe, were knocked down Juniper Tar and I Don't, the half-insane Polly-cracker, and "One thoroughbred Californian burro, named Balaam." Mr. Barlow bought Jimmy's rabbits; the cotton-duck-supe secured for his lame child the gray squirrels and the cunning white mice; while Mr. Sampson himself purchased the "ten trained cats and kittens, more or less," intending to keep them in his market, both as an attraction to customers and a protection against rats.

Terms were strictly cash and the friendly baker, acting in his official capacity as auctioneer, allowed nothing to be sold till it had received a fairly high bid. The total result was astonishing to even older people than little Tom, who felt that the Arabian Nights had been outdone in marvels, and whose small pockets soon became so stuffed with dimes, nickels, and dollars, that Mrs. Sampson feared he would lose some of them. So she brought out her roomy "reticule" and into



SHE WAS PACKING THE STATUETTES

this were promptly, neatly packed the ever-increasing proceeds till the last article on the list—the venerable mud turtle—went the way of his predecessors and became the property of Richard Roe.

“Now, Tom, it’s over, and let’s hurry to your house and give the money to Gail,” said Adelbert, proudly surveying the note-book in which he had made his entries. He had put his whole mind to the matter, striving to accomplish it as neatly as he fancied Jerry might have done and hoping that Gail would recognize this fact and favorably compare him with his model.

They found her on her knees in the old greenhouse, sadly packing between layers of cotton all of her twin’s now doubly precious handiwork, and her eyes so blinded by tears that she could scarcely see.

“O Gail, Gail, Gail! Look-a-here! Just you look-a-here! Hold your skirt out—make a good lap of it whilst I empty all this money in! See? See that? an’ that? an’ this? Ain’t that a lot? Balaam he fetched twice what father paid for him an’ Juniper Tar he brung twenty—dol-l-a-r-s!”

The girl ceased crying instantly, but brushed her hand across her forehead in that familiar manner which betokened confusion. So Adelbert showed her his note-book and was rewarded for his unusual efforts when she exclaimed :

“ Oh ! I’m so glad you wrote it all down—that will help us all to understand what seems almost too good to be true ! How well you write ! Tell me you can’t keep books if you choose ! Well, if the dear menagerie had to go, I’m thankful it was worth so much. This will be a wonderful help to father and mother.”

The lad was already flushing with pleasure but he cried, in surprise :

“ Why, ain’t it yours ? All your own ? I thought the circus belonged to you and Jerry.”

“ Indeed, it was Jerry who first thought of it, but nobody in particular owned it. Of course, we could never have had it except for our parents’ kindness in the matter and now that it’s gone, whatever it’s brought belongs to them. I’m sure they and all of us are vastly indebted to you for your help. We never could have carried the auction through

without you. Thank you, and I'll go myself to thank your father and mother."

Both the Dominie's worn face and that of his wife brightened greatly when Tom, as Gail insisted was his right, carried the money indoors and emptied it upon the table beside them. They added their thanks to Gail's; and Adelbert Sampson had never felt himself so much a man, so little a "Sissy" as at that moment. In his own awkward way he tried to express what he thought, but succeeded only in convincing his late instructor that "there was a deal of good in the spoiled son of the butcher if only it had a chance to develop."

For a few moments there was such a cheerful clatter of tongues that Luella left her crocheting to inquire the cause; and it was she who, looking over Gail's shoulder at the pages of the note-book, suddenly propounded the inquiry:

"Who in the world is John Doe? And who is Richard Roe? Those two men seem to have bought all the biggest animals. They've paid the highest prices, anyway, and all are written just the same: 'John Doe, per agent Hiram P. Smith.' I never heard of those men

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in Millville, and isn't it funny to have the two biggest payers have such queer names and so near alike? Do you know them, father?"

All looked toward the schoolmaster for his answer, and all were dismayed to see the sudden droop of his countenance, as he replied :

"There are no such persons and the money is not ours."

CHAPTER XVIII

SEPARATION

“WHY, father! What can you mean?” asked Gail, her own pleasure banished by his dismay. “Here is the money—if people don’t exist how can they pay that?”

“Those are fictitious names, long in use in courts of justice. It’s plain that our friend, the sawyer, has paid for the animals himself—agent for himself! Thomas, run up-street and ask Mr. Smith to stop here on his way back to the mill; or if he can’t do that, tell him that I will come to him at home, whenever he will be there.”

The lad departed but he did not “run.” He moved as if his feet were weighted with lead, and, having no excuse for lingering, Adelbert as slowly followed. But they had not far to seek the old man. He was already on his own way to Roseland, his ruddy face aglow with the success of the auction; nor did it darken at all when Tom blurted out:

“What ’d you go fool us all for, that way?”

I think—I think it's orful mean. My father he says they ain't no Mr. Doe, nor Mr. Roe, neither one. He says you've gone paid your own good money an' you've got to have it give back. He's mad as a hatter, my father is! An' I ——”

“Well, Master Thomas, what do you think? Tell me your thoughts, an' I'll give you the 'penny' you've heard tell of. More'n that, I'll make it a dime. Out with 'em! You won't get another such good offer in a dog's age!”

“Dogs! Who's got our dogs, anyhow? I—I think ——” Alas! Poor Tommy's thoughts were so painful that he lost his self-control and burst into a paroxysm of tears. This surprised himself as much as it did his companions and worked its own cure. “Why—why—whatever made me do that?” he exclaimed.

At which the others laughed and, in a moment, he was laughing, too. But he added, defiantly:

“I can't help it, but I ain't laughin' 'cause I feel like it. I'm doin' it 'cause—'cause —— Wull, just because!”

“Exactly, son. There couldn’t be a better reason give. Now, face about, soldier like, an’ keep step. I’ll step short an’ you step long, an’ ‘Sissy’ here ’ll mark time,” ordered the sawyer, taking the little boy’s hand in his and nodding to the older one.

Adelbert was minded to resent Uncle Hiram’s manner and to keep on his way homeward. But curiosity prevailed—he must return to Roseland to hear the outcome of an affair in which he had been so prominent. Therefore, he contented himself by saying, as he turned around :

“I ain’t goin’ back ’cause you ordered. I’m goin’ to please myself and because there wouldn’t have been no auction, only for me an’ ma. An’ I give you warnin’, Mr. Hiram P. Smith, that that’s the last time you dast to call me ‘Sissy.’ You or anybody else. I’ve graduated from that name. It ain’t a-goin’ to fit no longer, even if it might have fitted once.”

Instead of being affronted by this speech Uncle Hiram was honestly delighted. He stopped short on the path and his wrinkled face took on even a deeper glow, as he returned :

“Good enough! First rate! Adelbert Sampson, good for you! Them’s the sensiblest words I ever heard you speak. Whose opinion helped you to ‘graduate’ from your former foolishness? Though I guess the answer—either Jerry Graham or his lovin’ twin. Ary one, I congratulate you on the fact. I’m proud to make the acquaintance of Mr. Adelbert Sampson. Let’s shake hands on it.”

Whereupon the sawyer held out his toil-calloused hand and Delly took it; if rather reluctantly, still—he did take it. For as yet he had not been so long graduate in the school of common sense that he could perceive, upon the instant, the grasp of the homely old man to be also that of a genuine gentleman.

Then they hurried home and found their curiosity doomed to disappointment, for the Dominie immediately invited his old friend into the secrecy of the now bared study and closed its door. When the pair issued thence he was still downcast and troubled, the sawyer still gay and jovial; but it was noticeable that the latter held a small parcel in his hand and that it was at once given to Mrs. Graham, with the remark:

“I’ll be obliged to you, ma’am, if you’ll take charge of this here trifle till such time as I specify I want it. Meantime—— It’s all right.”

Was it possible he winked at the lady? Gail certainly fancied so and, in any case, was vastly relieved to see her mother’s expression brighten and to hear her answer, almost gaily :

“Thank you, good friend. Be sure it will be judiciously cared for. Can’t you stay and share a meal with us? Possibly the last you will ever take at Roseland? And Adelbert, too, who has proved so kind to us all.”

The sawyer was on the point of refusal, but a glance toward the butcher’s son made him hesitate. This invitation evidently meant a great deal to that socially ambitious youth, for, though the Grahams were so poor and he so well-to-do, he knew it was a step upward in the social scale for him to sit at meat at the table of these more cultured people. Also, Uncle Hiram felt that to partake of the household store was to lessen it for the needy family; but Mrs. Graham forestalled that objection by adding :

“Don’t fear to rob us, neighbor. Dear Mrs. Barlow has sent us in a batch of her famous biscuit; Mrs. Sampson made us a big meat-pie; and I went strawberrying myself this morning, before the others were awake. We have a feast spread for us by good friends—let our best friend grace it by his presence.”

Could anybody decline such a gracious bidding? Not Uncle Hiram P. Smith, even though he knew that he ought to be hastening hillward to look after the various purchases made that day, as agent for the unknown Doe and Roe. Nor did he spoil his acceptance by reference to the fact; though his hostess was keen enough to recognize that he would like to make his visit a brief one, so served supper without delay.

It was a merry feast. Rarely had merrier been enjoyed in that tidy living-room which, despite its half-furnished state, was scrupulously clean. The chairs rattled on the now bare floor; only the oldest, commonest of the household china served their needs, and not always even china. Tommy and Gail drank from tin cups and used paper napkins, while the little boy also pricked his tongue with a

broken tined cooking fork—none other being available. Cried Gail :

“ You see, friends, that mother has absolutely counted noses ! Five cups and plates for seven people ! Result—two of the people must give up their noses or eat from baker’s wooden dishes. Thomas Jefferson, is it a nose or a baker’s plate ? ”

“ I don’t care if it’s a baker’s dish or mother’s, so long as it’s full up ! ” returned the happy boy, his blue eyes fairly dancing with hungry eagerness. “ An’ say, mother ? What makes folks send us in such nice victuals now when they never did ’fore ? ”

“ My dear, blessings brighten as they take their flight, you know. The residents of Millville didn’t realize what valuable members of the community we Grahams were until they found they were to lose us,” quickly answered Gail, seeing a telltale flush steal into the housewife’s cheek. Oddly enough, the lady who had been most prone to bewail their “ poverty ” was the swiftest to resent others’ perception of the fact. If she had yielded to impulse she would have declined the proffered gifts, but she was too practical and too well-

schooled in the art of making a little go a long way, to dare refuse. Later, came other kinder thoughts, when the Dominie asked :

“ But, Mary, just transpose the case. If it were Mrs. Barlow or Mrs. Sampson in such trouble as ours, wouldn't you feel it a privilege to give them a lift? Of course; nor would it enter your head that you were bestowing a 'charity.' It's a safe rule, you know, to consider other folks to be as good—or a little better—than one's self. So, let's be thankful.”

“ Oh ! of course, I would be glad to help them; but I find it takes a deal more grace to accept favors than to bestow them,” she had answered with a little laugh which was not wholly mirthful. However, the favors were accepted and all Mrs. Graham's regret vanished as she saw how heartily they were appreciated by the guests about her table.

How the tongues flew ! Even Adelbert's, after his first self-consciousness was over and he began to feel at ease, as had the old sawyer from the beginning. The lad also felt a sort of pride that he could manage his napkin almost as well as Gail and Luella did theirs—

napkins not being a matter of daily occurrence at the Sampsons' oil-cloth covered table. Such recounting of the auction's incidents, such a mirthful hiding of the real sadness underlying the sale, such proud recitals of the animals' own fine behavior under new and trying conditions, made the stay-at-homes feel as if they, too, had been actually present on the spot.

When, all too soon, the meal was over, and the guests gone, Adelbert to carry home the delightful intelligence that he had been invited to supper with the Grahams and that his mother's meat-pie had proved "the tastiest you ever made"; and the sawyer remarking that if he didn't make haste that over-lively mud-turtle, Methuselah, and the one personal purchase he acknowledged, "would ha' clumb the hill 'fore me and likely be already sawing his shell into planks. Ought to make good lumber, if it's a hunderd years' seasoned!" he concluded.

So they went away and silence fell on Rose-land, with its bare rooms and its empty greenhouse; and by the end of the week its once so happy tenants had scattered, one by one.

When a force of workmen arrived to repair the old mansion for the new purchaser, the family hastily departed, though no cottage, nor suite of rooms, had yet been found to house them as a family. So they flitted, Mrs. Graham and Luella to the Barlow parsonage, there to become guests for an indefinite time; and on the basis that Mrs. Graham's nimble fingers should pay for the keep of herself and her daughter by accomplishing the pile of neglected sewing, that the minister's too busy wife had accumulated.

Tommy was claimed by Uncle Hiram, and rode thither triumphantly on Balaam, that sagacious animal being the sawyer's temporary "boarder" on terms satisfactory to the invisible Mr. Doe. To the lad the novelty of this visit quite banished any regret at home leaving; the only thing which could have added to his pleasure would have been Gail's presence at the mill. But this was not allowed. The schoolmaster had taken a small room for himself at the tavern and had been given work to do there, in the way of overhauling the accounts of various tradesmen, putting them into better shape, and receiving a fair wage

for the labor. That he would not like the task nor easily accomplish it, with his dreamy nature—so prone to wander from any subject in hand to others far remote—Gail fully understood. He needed her, as he had always needed her clear head and practical mind “to keep him steady.”

“My Gail is just as much a dreamer as I am, in her way, but it’s a different way. She never loses her head. She can always disassociate herself from visions without confusing them with facts. From her earliest childhood she has been my balance wheel; and while she is intensely sympathetic with all my moods she has firmness enough to resist them whenever they become too absorbing. I—I don’t see how I can possibly do without Gail,” the Dominie had said to Mr. Barlow, when he found himself really homeless and outside the Roseland gates.

It was Mr. Barlow and the girl, acting together, who had secured the apartment at the inn and the work which would make its dreary loneliness endurable; and it was she who had resolutely declined both Uncle Hiram’s and his sister’s invitations to spend

some time either at the mill or at her farm while she accepted one much nearer her father's retreat, where she could help him with his work.

It was to Mrs. Sampson's Gail Graham went, after all! Went not only willingly but eagerly. Not, as her proud hostess hoped, as an adopted daughter but as a "paying guest." The paying being by way of a thorough course of bookkeeping, which Gail accomplished by faithful study of the best methods, then as faithfully imparted to Adelbert, her pupil. Added to the bookkeeping was her assistance of Mrs. Sampson in household matters; and here, too, was a pupil both anxious and quick to learn.

At first Gail protested:

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Sampson, I don't see how I, a 'mere slip of a girl,' as you call me, can teach you, a grown woman, anything."

"Oh! but you can. You've been born different, grew up different, used to different. Your house, few times I saw it, was plain as a pipe-stem, but—but it didn't look like mine, some way. When I'd come home I'd feel all cluttered up, like. Seemed wasn't

room for anything; they was so many things. Yet they was all, they are all, nicer'n 'most the things your folks had; yet I'd like mine to look that way. Couldn't you fix 'em so's they would? As you'd want 'em if you was goin' to stay forever, like we'd be glad. Without no pay, never, and me an' him proud as Punch to call you daughter. Still feelin' that 'impossible' way, Gaily?" questioned the good woman, wistfully.

Then touched by the sincere affection glowing in the face before her, moved by its unexpected bestowal and anxious to prove her own appreciation of it, the girl leaned forward and kissed her hostess's fat cheek.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Sampson, I can't be anybody's daughter now, save that of those beloved people who have 'raised' me in the manner you admire. I'm like Topsey, 'I've just growed.' I haven't taken notice how, but I reckon I've been nipped and pruned into shape by countless bits of advice and corrections along the way. I'm not going to teach you anything, understand that, please. I'm not such a prig; but if you think I could make this room look any prettier, any more

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like mother's or Mrs. Barlow's, I'll begin on that. Shall I?"

"Yes, yes, do. An' I'll set down an' watch," answered Mrs. Sampson settling herself in a rocker and beginning to sway back and forth.

Gail opened her lips, shut them with a snap, and laughed; which made the other demand:

"What was you goin' to say?"

"Oh! I—I dare not! It's too horribly rude. Besides, dear Uncle Hiram does just the same yet he's a real gentleman, as real as if he talked book English."

"Oh! tell it. You've got my cur'osity all stirred up now," urged the other.

"Well, don't be angry, please! People don't 'set'—they 'sit.' And some people think that rockers belong to bedrooms; or, at least, that folks should never be rocking and talking to other folks at the same time. There! I'm ashamed, but—you made me."

"Don't you fret, honey. I'm not mad. An' I'm goin' to try to remember every single thing you tell me. I'd like to be just the sort of woman Delly'd be proud of. He's got

notions, Delly has, real high ones. What you doin' now?"

For the moment Gail scarcely noticed, though her hands were busy removing from the mantelpiece a gaudily colored lambrequin. Her thoughts were on this mother's words concerning her idolized son, and she fancied she had found an opportunity of "happiness spreading." Delly "had notions," had he? Well, she'd try to give him some other "notions" and worthier ones. Among them that a lad's highest notion should be to honor his mother. Another notion should be that his mother's happiness should be secured before his own. She had found him an apter pupil than she had expected in the matter of bookkeeping, and she hoped for good results in this new one of parent-respecting. She would tell him—ah! Jerry was not lost! He could, he did, still help her and point out things she would not have discovered for herself. He was, as Aunt Sarah had declared, still a part of her life and could never cease to be such. Jerry had never in all his own short beautiful life shown their mother anything but the tenderest love and reverence.

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Not even when, as had sometimes been the case, her overstrained strength or temper had brought sharpness upon him. She hated to speak of her brother to anybody, most of all to such an "outsider" as Adelbert, for Jerome had become in her mind her very own, sacred, absolute possession. To talk of him here would be like desecration; yet—to make others happy had been Jerry's highest ideal of life. Well, yes, then; she would picture to Adelbert what Jerry had been at home and so, indirectly yet most strongly, lead the admiring youth to remodel his own conduct.

"I say, Gaily, what you doin' that for? I took that lamberkin off a-yesterday an' shook it thorough. I don't believe even your pernickity ma could find a speck o' dust in it, if she tried ever so."

This question brought the girl out of her reverie into reality, and she answered, laughing:

"Why, I thought we might just try the effect of the mantel without its 'drape.' The wood is so beautiful and so finely finished, it seems a pity to cover it up; besides, this lambrquin is too heavy for summer. Why not

wrap all these woolen and velvet and silk fixings up and pack them away till next winter? And the heavy curtains—don't you think Delly would like it better if there were only the nice white shades left and the air could come in? He's always fussing with them and mussing them. They'd be better down, mother would think, till the cold weather made them more comfortable. They're very handsome. They ought not to be spoiled."

Gail said all this without hesitation. Having been requested to reconstruct the apartment she went into the task with enthusiasm. The Sampsons' house was a new one and finely finished in natural woods; but the ill-taught mistress of it had imposed upon its simple dignity such a mass of what the sawyer called "truck an' dicker," that its beauty was ruined; and now, beginning with this room, by the end of two weeks, the whole interior had been readjusted.

Even the butcher himself saw and enjoyed the improvement, and being something of a connoisseur in lumber could point out to their visitors how this or that bit of wood was of

such or such a variety, and had been selected by his trained eye as a perfect specimen of its kind.

It was fully two weeks when all the needed changes had been made. Even in the spare chamber which Gail occupied there were no longer "shams" of any sort, and sitting down for a little rest beside the open window of this room, the girl looked off toward the hill-road and sighed for a glimpse of little Tom who had disappeared upon it and had been absent ever since.

Through others she had learned that the sawyer was extremely busy, and that Tommy was his constant companion. There was a deal of lumber to be prepared for "Big House" and carted thither, and Tommy was driver! He drove a team of mules, overgrown cousins to Balaam, and was far too busy, himself, to make excursions townward.

"The dear little scamp! He acts as if he'd forgotten all of us, since he went into business. Mother says he hasn't been to see her, even, but father thinks it's all right. I'm afraid he doesn't know about all those trips to 'Big House,' or he might object to them, even

under Uncle Hiram's care. All he says is that the sawyer can make a better man of Tom than he can and that the child is living a normal, healthy life, 'if it could only last.' Poor father! he is the most depressed and unhappy of us all. Mother and Lu are having what is like a delightful visit; Tommy was never so happy; and I—well, I'm far better off than I deserve; but what is to come next? Adelbert has learned so fast and is really so faithful now to his father's wishes I have no excuse for staying. When I speak of working in a mill father puts up his hand in that tragic way which shuts my lips tight. But—heigho! If that isn't Master Tom, this instant, riding headlong—fairly headlong down the road on the burro—I am vastly mistaken!"

She ended her soliloquy by springing to her feet and rushing out of doors, the earlier to meet the little brother who was hastening to her. Arrived, he threw himself from the saddle and into her arms, with no sign of pleasure at the meeting but with the startling cry:

"Hurry up an' get your things! He's fell down and 's broke himself all to smash.

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Don't stop a minute—not a minute—'cause—
O my stars! I'm goin' for the doctor an' you
ride Balaam—but hurry, hurry! Don't
stand an' stare!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE UNEXPECTED

THE dear old sawyer "broken all to smash"! The idea was sufficient to send the girl flying into the house and to Mrs. Sampson with the startling information:

"Uncle Hiram has been hurt. Tommy has come for me and for the doctor. Good-bye."

With that she ran out again, sprang upon Balaam's back and sped away toward the old sawmill. Never before in all his career had the astonished donkey been so goaded and urged, so upbraided and cajoled, and if he could have spoken would doubtless have protested against such unkind treatment. As it was he did his utmost to please the girl in the boy's saddle and in due time arrived at the mill; where, indeed, were no signs of any disturbance and only the old assistant of its proprietor calmly piling lumber in the yard outside the shed.

Balaam was panting from exertion and Gail from excitement, as she leaped down and ran to the man, demanding:

“Where is he? What has happened to him?”

“H-hey?” asked the assistant, astonished to find himself seized by the arm and his reply half-shaken out of him.

Then she remembered that the poor fellow was extremely deaf and that Uncle Hiram’s communications with him were mostly by silent signs. When he did attempt verbal ones they were fairly yelled, and she now shrieked, at the top of her voice:

“Where is Uncle Hi? What has happened to him?”

“Uh. Hmm. H-hey? You want to see the boss? Well, he’s over to ‘Big House.’”

“The accident happened there, then?” again screeched Gail, but this time waited no reply. She knew a crossroad to the mansion and had often made it her roundabout course for the delivery of the eggs and poultry her mother had used to supply the former owners; making it a chance to pay a call upon the sawyer, en route. Latterly, he had also used it for the delivery of the lumber and it had become quite smooth—for a track which ran directly through the forest.

Again Balaam protested. He felt that he had traveled far enough for one petted donkey, so planted his feet firmly on the ground, switched his absurd little tail, and uttered an angry : " Ah-umph ! A-A-oumph ! "

" Well, stay here then, you heartless creature ! Refuse to go to the aid of that kind friend who has taken care of you ever since ' Mr. Doe ' bought you ? I've my opinion of you, sir, and I'm glad we no longer own you. Unsaddle yourself, at your leisure, for I can't wait."

She left him standing on the stony road and ran on, thinking that she was bound for now forbidden premises, yet sure that under these circumstances her father would have been glad to have her go. Nor had she gone far before she heard behind her the pat-pat-patter of small hoofs and knew that the burro followed. Even in the midst of her anxiety she smiled, reflecting :

" That's just like folks—human ones. Let them do as they've a mind and—they don't mind ! Well, come on, Sir Balaam ! You may be useful at ' Big House,' though I can't tarry your slowness now ! "

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It seemed an interminable journey through that beautiful forest, rich now in all its summer verdure, though its loveliness impressed her almost unconsciously. "The woods" always seemed full of Jerome's dear presence and she felt as if he were hastening with her to the relief and comfort of that faithful friend who had loved them both so well. Even the sawyer's peril grew less in her mind as, after a time, she had to move more slowly because of failing breath; and her conviction strengthened that:

"It cannot be that I must part with him, too! He is such a help to me—to everybody!"

"Ah-umph!" commented the burro, so cheerfully now that Gail smiled. They had come into view of the broad fields surrounding "Big House" where the beast realized was food and drink sufficient for many burros, and where rest awaited. She brightened, too, at sight of the familiar place, then felt her heart sink afresh, dreading the other sight upon which she so soon must look. "Broke all to smash!" That might mean—anything! Tommy was not always conserva-

tive in his recitals. He was apt to embellish them by flights of a very vivid imagination and maybe Uncle Hiram ——

What? Was this possible? There, upon the back porch which fronted this meadow, was the old sawyer himself! He was standing—so it couldn't be his legs that were broken. Waving his shirt-sleeved arms—so it couldn't be they. Nodding his gray head in vigorous approval—so that must still be sound. Halting one instant to assure herself of these facts, the next she sped over the distance between them and, grasping the old man's extended hands, cried:

“Oh! I am so thankful to see you all right! But what could Tommy mean? He was so excited ——”

“No wonder! He was with Mr. Graham when it happened. He behaved splendidly—and the old man realizes it. If he'd been grown up ——”

It was her turn to interrupt. “Does Tommy come here? Often? Is it great-uncle Joram that's hurt? Oh! what will father say?”

“Well, if he's the decent man I take him

to be, he'll put his prejudices in his pocket an' be thankful 't a little son of hisn was right on hand, in the nick o' time, and had sense enough to be useful."

"Tell me all, quick," gasped the girl, sitting down on the step the better to recover herself.

"Mr. Graham he likes to have his nose in all's goin' on. Right enough, too, when it's his money pays the cost. He took a notion one the stable floors wasn't sound an' as he's goin' in for blooded horses he was havin' it laid over. The carpenters are takin' their half-day off, bein' Saturday, an' he reckoned 'twas a good time to inspect their job, see how they was servin' him. Well, even Tommy didn't get the first rights of it, but somehow the poor feller stepped on what looked to be a part of the floor an' next he knew he'd fell into a fifteen-foot cellar an' broke his legs. Them servin' men he brought with him, that's kept his bachelor's hall so many years, they're tendin' him till the doctor comes. 'Twas our Tom give the warnin' an' he was cool enough then, whatever he was afterward. Comes round the corner the house, lookin' pretty

white but calm as molasses in January, an' says he: 'Uncle Hi, my big-uncle Joram has fell down his own cellar an' I guess you men better come get him out. He's awful still down there an'—you better come!' Huh! 'D you ever hear the beat? Not a whimper from the little tacker, nothin' but plain presence of mind.

"I reckon we went—the men an' me—an' by that time Mr. Graham had got over his shock an' was hollerin' fit to wake the dead, so we knew he was alive all right. We went round the back way an' fetched him up the cellar steps—him still a-screechin' so it set my head a-whirl an' got him on his own bed. The men undressed him, some way, an' I left an' come out where I could get a breath of peace an' watch for Tommy. Because that smart little chap had said right off, whilst we was handling poor Mr. Graham: 'He ought to have a doctor. I'll go after him on Balaam!' Now, wasn't that clever of him, even before anybody's told him? I'm proud of Tommy, I am."

"So, indeed, am I. The dear little fellow! But I—what good can I do? When he came

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I supposed, of course, it was you who were hurt, and I couldn't get to you half fast enough. Now—what will father say! It's ridiculous for me to correct you, dear Uncle Hiram, but are you sure you've done right in letting Tommy come to 'Big House' at all?"

"Humph! Could no more keep that boy away from here than you could a fly out of syrup! 'Twasn't none of my doings in the beginning. The oldest Graham an' the littlest one just took to one another from the word 'go.' They're as chummy as pease in a pod. An' I'm glad of it. I'm most amazin' glad of it."

It was so quiet out there on the back porch, so little sign of the trouble within the house behind, that Gail sat down on the steps, the better to consider this vexed question of right or wrong. Uncle Hiram sat down beside her and fixed his kindly eyes on her perplexed face, with a humorous smile hovering about his grizzled lips. Finally, he asked:

"How goes on that 'happiness spreadin'' of which you an' sister Sarah was so full?"

"Oh! I don't know. None too well, I fear; though I have tried to do a little of it. It was

Jerry who could make folks happy without even trying."

"Not a bit of it! He had to try always an' constant. All his life sufferin' with that weak heart of his, don't you believe he was so sunny and kind without 'tryin'.' Why, that dear laddie's whole existence was proof of what 'tryin'' can accomplish. So you, with your good health an' willin' mind—don't you give up, not a minute. Shall I tell you what I think?"

"O Uncle Hiram, please do. I'd like to go in and tell great-uncle Joram how sorry I am, yet I hate to displease my father. There is some terrible quarrel between them and I don't know what it is. If I did I might judge better."

"Well, little girl, I'm goin' to say some-thin' may hurt your loyal love to the Dominie, but it's got to be said. He's one them gentle, soft-spoke creatur's 't always gets his own way, while them that go blusterin' round, opposin' him always get beat. Not him, in particular, but—his kind. Like buttin' your head into a feather-bed. Soft as satin—but there! An' 'll smother you in a

jiffy if you don't give up an' take your head away. Now, it takes two to quarrel, but to end a quarrel one 'll answer. If the one is give a fair chance! I've seen a consid'able of Joram Graham these past weeks an' I like him. He's been a crusty old creatur', long's he was young. Now he's old an' he's—he's mellowin'; like them puppy-nose apples we have to keep all winter to make 'em tasty an' good eatin'. It's my opinion, an' I give it for what 'tis worth, that he's ready to give up his side the quarrel, whatever 'tis, an' make up friends again. 'Course, bein' a sort of harsh-spoke man all his days he can't change now. Our mistakes is often our safest leadin'. You come flyin' up here, thinkin' 'twas my tough old carcass had got broke, but find 'twas hisn; and I tell you, Abigail Graham, I believe this day's happenings have all been ordered by that dear Lord of Peace who abhors a quarrel. I believe that for you to go in an' say a word o' cheer to that poor broken old man in the room up-stairs, whilst he's waitin' for the doctor, 'd please your Heavenly Father, however him 'at stands in place of an earthly one might chance to look at it. An'—you'll have

to speak it quick, too, if at all ! there comes the doctor's rig up the road an' bless me ! Tommy's drivin' ! ”

Gail sprang up, her hesitation gone. She remembered all at once that the Dominie's anger against his uncle had been on account of wrong done to somebody else, not to himself. This seemed to make disobedience to his wishes less than if it had been a personal injury. Besides, “ blood is thicker than water,” and great-uncle Joram had liked and admired Jerry. A thought of what her beloved brother would have done now decided her, and with a light, swift step she entered the house and, a moment later, the room to which instinct seemed to guide her—as well as the groans that issued thence.

The master of “ Big House ” lay under a light blanket with his eyes closed and his face contorted by pain. The ruddy color had gone from his fat cheeks and his hands were clenched in an effort to suppress the signs of his agony. At momentary intervals he appeared to lose and recover his consciousness, and during one of these he asked impatiently :

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“ Will that doctor never come ? ”

“ He is almost here, Uncle Joram. I saw him on the way,” answered Gail, standing at the bedside and laying her hand lightly on his brow.

Then he opened his eyes with a snap and demanded :

“ You here ? Why ? Who sent you ? ”

“ Nobody sent me. Can I do anything for you ? ”

“ No, you can't. Only clear out. Send Tommy—the doctor —— ”

The girl resented the tone and thought that her opposition to the schoolmaster's wishes was working its own punishment ; and though she said nothing she was greatly relieved to hear the doctor's voice in the hall outside and swiftly retreated from the room. But the physician met her on the threshold and joyfully exclaimed :

“ Why, Gail, my girl ! You here ? That's fine—that's fine. That's exactly as it should be. Wait in the room below till I come down.”

This was the Grahams' family doctor and family friend ; and though the girl her-

self had rarely needed his professional services he had seen much of her during his attendance at Roseland and she was his prime favorite.

Then came Tommy, to be somewhat upbraided for his scare of her concerning Uncle Hiram and to set her reproofs aside with the lightness he bestowed upon all such things.

“Wull—— Wull! If he isn’t Uncle Hiram he’s a really, truly one. I like him first-rate. Me an’ him goes fishin’, an’ shootin’—he’s goin’ to give me a gun myself if—if father ’ll let him. An’ I think it’s worse to have truly uncles, even whenny ones——”

“Tom, that is a wen, without an h. For a boy smart enough to go for the doctor and drive mules—— Hmm.”

Tom changed the subject. “My father he’ll be mad at you for comin’. My mother, she won’t. I asked her an’ she let me. She said not to tell father. She didn’t like to go against him, she didn’t like it a bit, but she liked ‘olive branches,’ an’ when folks held ’em out to her she felt just like takin’ ’em. I heard her say all that to Jimmy Barlow’s aunt; and Jimmy Barlow’s aunt she said, ‘More ’specerly

when 'twas rich relations held 'em out.' And they, my mother and Jimmy Barlow's aunt, they talked a lot more, and my mother hopes my father won't be angry with her but 'll come to see that she acted for the best an' 't he was himself mistook. What's it all about, anyway, Gaily? If big-uncle Joram is our big-uncle, why don't we act with him just's if he was Uncle Hiram P. Smith? It bothers me. It bothers me orful. To Sunday-school I learned 'Love your enermies,' an' my father he says big-uncle Joram is a nenermy. Then why shouldn't I love him? That's what I'd like to know. I asked Uncle Hi and he said: 'Give it up! Too deep a question for me!' That's what he said. So I—— Well, I just minded my mother. An' Gaily, I like it here. I like it first-rate. It ain't quite so nice as the sawmill, but it's nice—it's dreadful nice, an' I'd just as lief stay here all the time. Just as lief as not."

"Why, Tommy boy! Stay here always? Surely not after father finds us a new home and we can be all together again. You didn't think of that, did you?" cried the girl, giving the lad a kiss.

He snuggled to her side and looked up into her face with his wheedling smile, saying :

“Gail, I’ll bet you a cent I could get big-uncle Joram to let us come live in some his empty rooms. I told him once, I did, ’t they was terr’ble empty, an’ he said, ‘Huh ! So they are, lad, so they are. They’d ought to be filled with Grahams!’ an’ he didn’t mean bread neither, though that’s the only kind he eats. Peter-baker brings it every day. I ——”

“Thomas Jefferson Graham, how do you know what sort of bread Mr. Joram Graham eats? Have you been here to meals?”

“Wull—wull —— What can a feller do when he gets hungry if he does be in the wrong house. I might get hungry—terr’ble hungry right in this very one, I may. An’ if—if the hungry catches me on the spot an’ there’s victuals ’round, an’ they sort of walk theirselves into my mouth, a feller can’t help myself, can he?”

“Tommy boy, one thing is certain amidst many uncertain ones : for a schoolmaster’s son you use the very poorest grammar possible. To school you’ll go, somewhere, whether to your father’s or not ; and the more wrong

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things you do the worse is your language. I've noticed that, sir."

Gail smiled, but Tommy paid no heed to smiles. The problems vexing him were beyond smiles to settle. For the first time in his life he had found a division in the commands of his mother and father, and whichever one he obeyed he had a sense of wrongdoing toward the other. Suddenly, he cried :

"Sister, what can a feller do? I want to be a good boy. I do want to be good like Jerry, an' all the time I keep doin' things 't are naughty to somebody. I wish—I wish things didn't happen like they do!"

Gail sighed. How heartily she wished so, too. How perplexing was this "life" which she had once accepted so carelessly. Fortunately, it was but a short time afterward that she heard the doctor coming down the stairs, and silence succeeded the footsteps which had echoed through the rooms overhead. There was no wavering nor uncertainty in the good physician's manner, and there was rest in the firmness of his voice, as he said :

"Both of Mr. Graham's legs are broken, and one break is serious enough to a man of his

age and habit. I shall send two trained nurses here at once, a man and a woman. His confinement will be long and tedious. He wishes both of you children to help him bear it, and you, Gail, to remain in this house. The woman who is coming to nurse will be company for you and make it right for you to stay. Till she gets here, I want you to take charge of his food. You've learned good cookery from your excellent mother—now is your chance to prove it. Fix him a nice cup of milk-gruel, right away. The man-cook who belongs here can manage for a healthy person—I judge he's had no experience in catering to the sick. Good-bye."

He was already at the door when Gail caught his coat skirts to detain him. She had listened to his remarks in a confused way, meaning to set him right as soon as he had finished, and he had almost gone before she realized it. Now, in dismay, she cried:

"But, doctor! I can't! My father wouldn't permit ——"

"Nonsense, nonsense! That's all right. I'll see him and explain. It will be all right, be sure of that. Tommy, you'd better sleep

at the mill, just as you have been doing, but come over at odd times during the day, to superintend the work going on and report injuries to me—also, just as you have been doing! Obligated to you for help in my business! But make it your home at Uncle Hiram's, for a very little of you goes a long way in a house! Especially in a house of long illness as this is bound to be. Good-bye, good-bye. I'll be up again at dusk, with the nurses, if they don't arrive before then. Good-bye!"

With a laugh at their astonishment, the busy man went off upon his rounds and left them staring at one another with incredulity.

Surely it was the unexpected which had happened. Another home had opened to receive the "happiness spreader," the once rejected home of "Big House"; and instantly her duties therein began; for hastily entered Wilson, Mr. Graham's own man, with the message:

"Mister Graham desires the young lady would step up-stairs."

Also, the message was personally delivered,

for in a tone lustrous with pain and impatience, came the shout from above :

“ Abigail Graham ! Come up here right away ! I want you ! ”

CHAPTER XX

THE TWO JEROMES

THE old man turned his head wearily upon his pillow, and looked down along the stiff outlines of his plaster-cased limbs. Life, under these conditions, had become almost intolerable. He would have found it wholly so save for the presence of the girl who now stepped to the bedside and asked, in a voice modulated to the requirements of a sick room :

“ What can I do for you, Uncle Joram ? ”

“ Sit down in that chair and talk to me. Let me talk to you, if I want to, and just as I want. Has that nurse gone, yet ? That woman one ? ”

“ Yes. It is her recreation hour, you may remember.”

“ Oh ! I remembered, but she never appears to. Always has to linger and talk a little longer. I hate a gabbler. If you were one I'd wring your neck ! ”

Gail answered by a merry laugh and the words :

“ I think not, Uncle Joram ; for the simple reason that I shouldn't put my neck within reach.”

He laughed, too, a trifle gruffly, then ordered :

“ Fetch that chair and sit down. It gives me the fidgets to see anybody always on the move. The room is horribly neat, already ; you couldn't find a speck of dust even with a microscope. Sit down.”

Obediently, she brought a chair and placed herself upon it, delaying only long enough to put away the duster she had been using.

“ Now, you poor dear, I'm ready to listen, if you're ready to talk,” she said, folding her hands serenely in her lap, in a fashion he commended.

“ Well, there's another good thing about you, Abigail. That is—you can be absolutely still sometimes. You're about the only female I ever saw who could be, except my mother. They had sense enough to give you her name and maybe that's the reason why you are like

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her, in so many ways. Ever seen her portrait?"

"No, Uncle Joram, how could I? I didn't know you had one. May I see it?"

"Sure. I want to compare notes. How long you been here? But you needn't answer. I know. I know to a minute that it's just fourteen days and seven hours since I fell into that confounded cellar and laid myself on the shelf. Heigho! And I was just beginning to enjoy things, getting back to country life. I was born on a farm, you know."

"Yes, I know. Father told me."

"Your Uncle Philibert, you mean. How much did he tell you, Abigail Graham?"

"About what? I—I'd rather call him 'father,' please. He is the only father I've ever known, Uncle Joram," she returned, gently.

"But not the real one. Not the father I want to talk to you about. You're a big girl, and a sensible one. Did Philibert tell you why we quarreled?"

"No, indeed. The most he said was that you had wronged somebody who was dear to

him and that, until that wrong was righted, there could be no friendly intercourse between you ; even between yourself and us, his family."

" But you're here. There's been considerable 'intrycourse,' as Tommy calls it, between you and me during the past fortnight. A pretty trying 'intrycourse' for you, I guess."

" Yes, I'm here. I don't know yet whether I am doing right in staying, even though no objection has come to me from father," she answered ; and after that there were many minutes of silence in the great room. It was broken, at last, by the old man's directing :

" Go to that little movable desk on that table yonder and open it. Here's the key. Fetch me a purple velvet case you'll see lying inside. Don't drop it. It's worth a fortune. A fortune to me, anyway."

She took the key he unfastened from a bunch of others, which he kept always lying near him, and brought the velvet case. It was quite large and heavy and, as she was about to place it in his hands, he further directed :

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“Sit down first—so I can see your face. Then open it.”

She obeyed, her curiosity now greatly aroused; and, as the covers flew apart, exclaimed, in amazement:

“Oh! how beautiful! How exquisite this is!”

“That is a miniature of your great-great-grandmother, carved on sardonyx. Before he was quite eighteen your own father copied it from an old oil portrait. It was the last piece of work he did before—before he left me. It was, also, his best; because then he loved me, and hoped to prove by it that he was right and I was wrong. Your boy father at eighteen! His name was Jerome.”

The old man's voice was full of emotion, and Gail's eyes suddenly suffused with tears. The two Jeromes! The two lads, so like in gifts and ambitions, father and son—both gone! Then she looked toward the bed and asked:

“Have you a picture of him, too?”

“No, Abigail, but you need none. No two human beings ever more closely resembled one another than your father and your



"OH, HOW BEAUTIFUL!" SHE EXCLAIMED

brother, save that one was physically strong, the other weak. Did Philibert ever tell —— How much do you know of the past, my child?"

Could it be possible that this man, now so gentle, was the same irate invalid who had made life a burden to all about him during the fortnight just gone? She looked at him as if he were a stranger and almost he would have appeared so to himself. He was pale and had grown thin, he was neatly shaven, and his objectionable wen was hidden by a tidy silk skull-cap. In place of the fretful energy that was his habit had come a calm acceptance of the suffering which had befallen, though it must be admitted this patience was not always noticeable. However, just now, he seemed to have forgotten himself in memories of his earlier years; and, after a few more moments of silence, he said:

"I'm going to tell you the whole story, from my side. Whether it agrees with Philibert's side I don't know, though I believe him truthful. The story will probably hurt you some, but not as it has hurt me all these years. Oh! if the mystery could be cleared up! If

I could know why—why—he did it! Give me the miniature. My mother was the only woman I ever loved and who ever understood my two-sided nature. I shall feel as if I were talking to her, with that case in my hands.”

Gail felt as if she were about to participate in some solemn ceremony, as she placed the portrait of that dead and gone old gentlewoman in her old son’s hands and, drawing her chair still closer to the bed, quietly sat down. Nor during all the startling tale that followed did she once disturb the speaker by a movement. He began:

“This accident has proved to me that life is uncertain. I hope to live many years and enjoy the wealth I have accumulated, but—I may die to-morrow. Long ago, my only brother died. He left to my care his three sons. The eldest, George, grew up so much like myself that I—almost hated him. It isn’t pleasant, nor flattering, to see one’s faults, or even virtues, reproduced in another individual, and that individual perpetually under one’s nose. You don’t know your Uncle George. He is exactly your great-uncle Joram, done over again on a slightly smaller

scale. Philibert you do know. We needn't discuss him. Jerome was the middle one of the three lads, and the only one I really loved. Even he didn't know, from any declaration of mine, that I did so, though he must have guessed it, because he was the only one who had no fear of me. From the beginning he took it for granted that he could have his will of me and he generally could. A sweeter-natured boy was never born. He was the sunshine of my bare bachelor home and the very idol of his brother Philibert. I intended him for my heir. I meant he should take over all my business, retaining my name as the firm and making it notable in all the country. He had brains and enterprise enough for this and I felt no fear of his opposing my plans till, on one misguided day, I took him to a sculptor's studio; for I, too, in an untrained way, have a passion for sculpture.

"That was the beginning of the end. He was never the same boy afterward. He immediately began to model and carve, out of any material at hand, and at first I was supremely proud of his ability—his genius.

It proved to be nothing less than that. I even went so far as to send him to the studio for instruction ; and after that he flatly refused to carry out any of my long prepared plans. He would never go into business. He didn't care at all for money. His life was his own ; God had given him a talent, and he should use it. He was sorry, oh ! yes ! he was sorry to disappoint me, but if he did so in one way might he not make me equally proud in another ? Let him try, anyway ! Would to God I had ! ”

Again Uncle Joram was silent, and for so long that Gail finally asked : “ What next ? ”

“ Next was a bitter, bitter quarrel. We were both Grahams and all the race have nasty tempers. Tempers which run away with judgment, affection, even common sense. If I'd retained an atom of the latter I'd have given Jerry his head and let him succeed or fail, as might be. Instead, I ordered him out of the house, out of my sight, out of my life. And he obeyed orders ! Ah ! yes. He was most conscientiously obedient ; he went at once.

“ Now comes the part will hurt. I had an

appointment that night and I was obliged to keep it. Just as I was going out a man to whom I had lent ten thousand dollars came to pay me. Not in money but in precious gems of which he was a collector, and in the procuring of which he had spent his fortune. There were but a few of them, yet so valuable that they made up the full debt. They were in a tiny chamois bag, and in my agitation over the quarrel with Jerome, I hastily signed a receipt for them and laid the bag on the table in the room where Jerome still stood, himself profoundly agitated and unnerved by this break with me.

“Then I hurried away and—the gems were missing when I returned. Jerome took them. He had no money of his own, and the small allowance I made him was always mortgaged before it was due, he was so generous to other people. That night he sailed for Europe and it was seven years before any of us looked upon his face again. I never did.”

Gail gasped. This story was more terrible than she had dreamed; and though she suffered its pain, she saw that the old man on the bed suffered more keenly still. The

reason was—he believed it and she did not. Instantly, a natural love for a father, so like her own Jerome, convinced her that somewhere was a dreadful mistake. Her own father a —— She could not even think the shameful word, and hurriedly asked :

“ Did you make any search for the gems? How could you believe such a horrible thing of a boy you had yourself brought up ? ”

“ Oh ! I searched enough. Far and near. Had the best detectives in the city take up the case. Nobody, nothing was left untried. The jewels had disappeared ; so had the handsome, erring lad who took them.”

“ But my uncles—did they, too, believe their brother a criminal ? ”

“ George did. Didn't I tell you he was myself right over again? Oh ! he was glad enough to believe, for I was a rich man and this was one heir out of the way. Philibert didn't, never has, never will. That is our quarrel. He turned on me like the ingrate he is and while he was careful to use only respectful language he gave me to understand that I was about as vile and low-down a specimen of manhood as ever existed. He vowed

then and there that he would never again be my friend, never accept another favor at my hands, and—more to that effect. He vowed that as soon as he was able he would pay back the full value of the gems and—any amount of such talk. Pay? That fellow? He has no more ability to make money than Jerome had, but he's kept his word in the other respect. He keeps on religiously hating me and despising me, and it isn't pleasant; especially as I know I am right, hateful as that right is, and am perfectly willing to aid Jerome's children—or you, his child."

It was a wretched state of things, yet somehow the girl listener was not dismayed. She had faith to believe that this wrong would be set right—some time, some way, at present unforeseen; and her heart thrilled with love for her adopted father because of the loyalty to her unknown one which had cost him so dearly. As a relief to the tension which held them both, she got up and gave her uncle his medicine; then asked:

"Will you tell me the rest? About my father's coming back after—after the seven years?"

“There’s little to tell. He had married, been widowed, lost his health, his expensive line of work had not been popular, and he had only money enough to bring him and his twin babies back to America. From the hospital where the ship’s people immediately sent him on his arrival here, he sent word to us, but I would not go to see him. Of course, since I wouldn’t George wouldn’t. Philibert went, stayed with him till he died, buried him, and adopted his children, although he was himself unmarried at the time, only engaged to the woman he loved. He never married her, by the way. She wasn’t brave enough to take him in his poverty and burdened with the charge of two little babies. So he married Mary who was brave enough and who has made him a good wife. Lest you should hear of your own father’s shame he allowed all to think that you and your brother were his own children, and it has been left to me to tell you the truth. I feel that somebody should let you know it, even bitter as it is. Philibert won’t, and George would be glad to. With all due respect to George, I believe it has come to you from me

less painfully than it would have done from him.

“We had never disclosed the name of the suspected party, even to the detectives who worked on the case, and they never knew that your father had been present in the room with the gems. They were allowed to believe that he had left home, was already on the steamer, before the stones were brought to me. It wasn't so easy to deceive them but, for pride's sake and the family honor, it was done.

“After the funeral, George offered to clothe you children as long as Philibert would board and educate you, but upon the condition that there should be no acquaintance between his family and you. Careful soul! He hasn't a child can hold a candle to either you or our lost Jerry! And he's been just a trifle too exact in his copying of me, as he'll find out to his cost, some day!”

The old gentleman's manner was now so natural and crusty that Gail laughed, and exclaimed :

“That, then, explains the Aunt George boxes!”

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“ Abigail Graham, you laughing? Actually laughing after this disreputable story I have told you—you, the daughter of a th ——”

Instantly her hand had flown to his lips and she had ceased to laugh, even to smile. “ Don’t say that! Don’t say anything you’ll be sorry for, dear old uncle! And if I laugh it is because I am sure—sure—sure that my father never touched those jewels. How could he? Since you had brought him up, you whom I have heard father-Philibert say ‘had never cheated a human being out of a cent.’ ”

“ Did he say that? Angry Philibert? ” demanded Mr. Graham, with a pleased light in his eyes.

“ Of course he did. By the way, have you any more of my own father’s work? ”

“ Yes. I kept all he had done. It’s there in that desk, just as he packed it, when it was finished. In cotton wool and paper to protect it. I just turned the key upon it and have never opened it since—till now.”

“ Oh! then let’s go all through it. I am so eager to see it. If my own Jerry could be here this minute! I can see the shine in his

beautiful eyes as it would have been—my darling Jerry !” she returned, her voice trembling.

The old man laid his hand on hers and said very kindly :

“ Yes, dear, bring it. I have grown to love you, because of him I lost. We will go over it all, together, and I can explain every single piece. I was more proud than he when each was finished, for, artist like, he was never satisfied with his own accomplishments.”

Evidently, though he believed her father’s guilt, he had not ceased to love him ; and Gail made haste to bring the little desk and place it on the small table beside the bed. Then she began to take out each bit of the delicate carved work, unwrapping and tenderly examining, her delight increasing all the time, and their owner describing the circumstances under which all were produced.

Finally, at the very bottom of the desk, lay a time-yellowed, legal envelope, addressed in an unknown hand to :

“ Mr. Joram Graham, 123 North Willett Street, City. The parcel left on the table in the library the night of my leaving home.” Signed, “ Jerome Graham.”

“Why, uncle, what is this? There’s something lumpy in it, a sealed letter to you, hidden away down underneath the paper that lines the desk.”

She lifted the letter, held its superscription so that he could read it, saw his face go ghastly white, and heard him stammer:

“O—open it—quick—quick!”

She did so hurriedly, seeing his agitation, and took from within a little chamois bag. Then she heard him gasp: “The gems! the—gems!” and saw that he had fainted.

CHAPTER XXI

CONCLUSION

As the nurse so timely entered by one door, Gail fairly flew out of the other, leaving the desk and its contents exposed to the gaze of any who might see. The precious desk which had at last revealed the secret of so many years, had vindicated the honor of her father, and made everything all right.

“Oh! If Jerry were only here to share the blessed news! But then he never knew, he did not suffer because of it. But father, darling father-Philibert—how can I get to him fast enough!”

Out of the house as out of the room sped the excited girl; down the hill by any road, cross-lots or otherwise, and into the inn chamber where sat a weary-hearted man, toiling at uncongenial tasks. Who found himself almost choked in the ecstatic embrace that seized him from behind, while his new fountain pen—procured at such reckless expenditure for the

more clerkly bookkeeping—was tossed out of his hand while the inkstand would have followed the pen, had his assailant been less carefully trained.

Unclasping her arms, he looked into her radiant, yet tear-stained face, and cried:

“Why, Gail, my daughter! what has happened?”

“Think, you precious man! Think of the very loveliest thing in all the world that could have happened and then know it’s true!”

“Alas! dear heart. I can, nowadays, more readily think of unlovely ones,” he returned, drawing her around to his side and placing his arm about her waist, “but if good has come to you I am glad, indeed.”

“To me—to you—to everybody! Father, the lost gems are found! I know all; Uncle Joram has just told me, and, best of all, the little bag has just been found that clears my own father of disgrace and proves to every one how noble, how true was your faith in him. Oh! how can I ever repay to you all you have sacrificed for Jerry and me! How for your loyalty to my dead father whom, although

unknown, I do love? But come, come, come! We mustn't waste another minute's time before this dreadful misunderstanding of so many years is set right. Poor, helpless Uncle Joram! The good news was almost too much for him, and you must come to him—he cannot come to you. I want to see your hands clasp—I want—O come!”

They did not tarry even to share the good news with the mother, a message should be left for her to also “come,” but in the old familiar fashion, her arm resting lightly on his shoulder, all her old faith in him expressed and justified, they sped together up the hill, into “Big House,” and into the presence of the lonely old man who welcomed them in a silence more expressive than words.

But at last sobbed Uncle Joram :

“How can I ever forgive myself for the injustice I have done? I who prided myself upon my perfect justice to all men! Oh! my poor lad, my well-beloved, wickedly wronged Jerome! A thousand times richer you, Philibert, with your clear conscience and your poverty, than I with all my wealth and this regret!”

Then—but why prolong a story that is told? That was the beginning of many happy days for all in Millville; not only those who bore the name of Graham, but for all their friends and well-wishers. “Big House” was no longer empty; and the happiest one of all who filled its roomy chambers was the Dominie’s Gail. Not because of rumor which settled it that she should be its master’s heir; for money, in itself, troubled her not at all.

Only glad and thankful for the heritage of peace between all her race; for the comfort which came to Mary Graham, presiding at last over a mansion which satisfied her highest social ambition, and whence she could bestow upon others some of the blessings now fallen to her lot; for the leisure that had come to the scholarly gentleman who had lived so obscurely yet so nobly, and could now delve in any book he loved without having added to it that objectionable tail of “keeping.”

Not least of the girl’s satisfaction was the fact that now he no longer needed it, the charge of the school was immediately tendered him, and he was “unanimously called by the School Board to resume his old position,

with a doubled salary, the untrained sophomore having proved unequal to the position."

For one doubtful moment the Dominie's decision hung in the balance; but his beloved Gail promptly turned it, by the reminder:

"Why, father mine! Give up the first chance of your life to devote yourself to literature? Isn't the charge of Uncle Joram's correspondence drudgery enough to satisfy your abnormal conscience? Isn't the salary attached as big as that of the school? Haven't you still to fit me for college, while dear little Luella can go off to the boarding-school which will suit her better, and have pretty clothes galore? And Thomas Jefferson—is he to be trusted in a stable full of spirited horses, without somebody in authority to prevent his breaking his neck? And as for that dear old, cranky, adorable Uncle Joram, who feels he can never do enough for any Graham to compensate the injustice once done one, is he to be disappointed in his old age of the nephew-son he 'raised'? Indeed, no. Back to no school you go; but into the cosiest of studies, or the dreamiest of woods, and the troutiest of

streams, to be just happy, happy, happy, as you well deserve."

In those days there was no gainsaying the radiant Gail. She must have everybody do just what he or she liked best, in his or her own way, and like the Jerome of old, she had but to intimate a desire to her doting old great-uncle to have it gratified. It was, therefore, quite in the natural order of things that one day he and she gave a dinner party. To it were bidden a mixed but delighted and grateful company. Witness: the shining faces of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson, her friends in time of need; the open-hearted Mr. and Mrs. Barlow, with Jimmy, the latter somewhat hampered in his behavior by the supervision of his aunt; Adelbert, in a new suit that was not of the largest plaid, and a necktie that was not glaring, and comporting himself in rather a patronizing manner, as an old friend of the young hostess.

Came, also, Aunt Sarah from the farm, and beloved Uncle Hiram P. Smith, in his Sunday blacks and his most jovial Sunday mood. Oh! there were many there, even the cotton-duck-supe and his family, as well as the new

owner of Roseland ; and doubtless, few if any of these willing guests had ever partaken of a feast so grand as that.

For in one part, Uncle Joram would have his own way, and Gail joyfully acceded it : the table should be furnished by a caterer from the city, with the choicest viands obtainable, so that for once the housewifely Mrs. Graham should be free from care, and sit at her own board, the served and not the server.

When all was over, Uncle Joram, now able to support himself on crutches, rose and proposed :

“ A toast ! To the Dominie’s Gail ! The widest ‘ Happiness Spreader ’ I ever knew. Let us drink it to her in this sparkling water from the old spring in the wood ! ”

They all followed his suggestion and stood, glasses in hand ; and when all had quaffed the pure liquid, responded Uncle Hiram :

“ To ‘ John Doe ’ and ‘ Richard Roe,’ master of ‘ Big House,’ purchaser of out-of-business menageries, and general benefactor of Millville township ! May his shadow never grow less, long may he wave, et cetera, so on, and so forth ! Hip, hip, hur-ray ! ”

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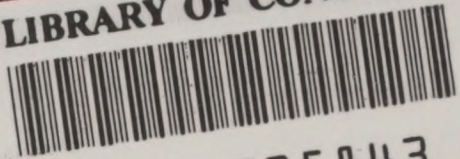
Loyally they echoed the sentiments thus expressed ; even from behind Tommy's chair coming unrebuked the appreciative bark of Juniper Tar and the joyful yelp of little I Don't.

THE END





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